

January  
2008

# ANIMATION

MAGAZINE

TM



Your Special Guide  
to All the Award  
Season Newsmakers



The Big Toon  
Anniversaries  
of 2008



## Will The Golden Compass Point to Oscar Gold?



"It's pretty tough to resist a curmudgeonly ogre and his spunky royal wife, a loquacious donkey and a dashing cat in a plumed hat. Not only are the characters endearing and their antics consistently amusing, but the witty dialogue also feels up-to-the-minute and a natural progression from its predecessors. The world of the fanciful fable looks particularly vibrant this time with its signature blend of realism and fantasy."

Claudia Puig – USA Today

## FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION



# DREAMWORKS SHREK THE THIRD

#### BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

Produced by: Aron Warner

#### BEST DIRECTOR

Chris Miller

#### BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

Story by: Andrew Adamson

Screenplay by: Jeffrey Price & Peter S. Seaman  
and Chris Miller & Aron Warner

#### BEST ART DIRECTION

Production Designer: Guillaume Aretos  
Art Director: Peter Zaslav

#### BEST ORIGINAL SCORE

Harry Gregson-Williams

#### BEST FILM EDITING

Michael Andrews

#### BEST SOUND MIXING

Andy Nelson – Anna Behimer

#### BEST SOUND EDITING

Supervising Sound Editors:  
Richard L. Anderson, M.P.S.E. – Thomas Jones

#### BEST VISUAL EFFECTS

Visual Effects Supervisors:  
Philippe Cluckman – Ken Bielenberg

#### BEST COSTUME DESIGN

Israel Segal

#### BEST ORIGINAL SONG

"Royal Pain"

Written By: E

Produced by: Mark Oliver Everett





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- New Corel® Painter Essentials 4 available immediately only to Intuos3 Special Edition users through free download.



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MATT GROENING





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SO FAR."

the  
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MOVIE

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-Stephen Holden, THE NEW YORK TIMES



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NEW YORK  
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CLOSING NIGHT

BEST PICTURE  
EUROPEAN  
FILM AWARDS  
NOMINEE

## **BEST PICTURE**

**BEST DIRECTOR**  
MARJANE SATRAPI AND  
VINCENT PARONNAUD

**BEST ADAPTED  
SCREENPLAY**  
MARJANE SATRAPI AND  
VINCENT PARONNAUD

**BEST ANIMATED FEATURE**

**BEST ORIGINAL SCORE**  
OLIVIER BERNET

**BEST ART DIRECTION**  
MARC JOUSSET

**BEST FILM EDITING**  
STÉPHANE ROCHE

**BEST SOUND EDITING**  
THIERRY LEBON

**BEST FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE FILM**

# **PERSEPOLIS**

A FILM BY MARJANE SATRAPI AND VINCENT PARONNAUD

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Farm's PTrack 4.1. [by Todd Sheridan Perry]

## 54 Opportunities

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**60 A Day in the Life.** Members of the prolific team at Netherlands' Telescreen invite us to share their creative lives!

**Cover:** New Line's *The Golden Compass* storms into theaters this month, delivering a mind-blowing array of digital effects.

**Wrap-Around Cover:** Disney/Pixar's *Ratatouille*.







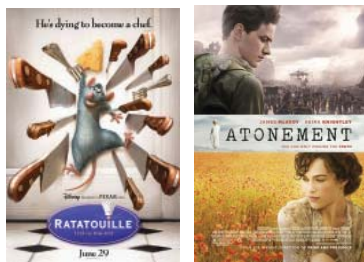
**A**s we're quickly marching toward the inevitable end of the year, there suddenly seems to be a whole lot of controversy brewing in our favorite corner of the entertainment world! Among the many heated questions and discussions we've observed in the past couple of weeks:

It's totally understandable that live-action writers are on strike and demanding their fair share of the new media pie, but what about the poor animation writers? What do they have to do to get some respect in this cruel, rat-eat-dog business?

Where do performance-capture movies like *Beowulf* fall in the fast-moving animation field? Is it fair to compare a personal, hand-drawn movie like Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* to something from a parallel universe called *Alvin and the Chipmunks*? And now that the Academy has given animated features their own category for the past five years, why can't we have five movies compete for the big prize? Wouldn't it be awesome if an animated movie ends up competing in the Best Picture field, as *Beauty and the Beast* did back in 1992?

This may come from the left field, but isn't Amy Adams (*Enchanted*) one of the best things about American movies in 2007? I think everyone is tired of the depressed, angst-ridden *artistes* who insist on making us suffer for their art. (Jennifer Connelly, anyone?) If Adams doesn't get an Oscar nom this year, it could only mean Academy voters have formed an unholy alliance with the movie's wicked queen.

While we're praising underrated work in our favorite movies, how about Peter O'Toole's terrific voice work as Anton Ego, the tough food critic in *Ratatouille*; Brad Bird's subtle script for his movie, *Surf's Up*'s excellent lighting and depictions of sand and water; *Shrek the Third*'s dazzling costumes and *Persepolis*'s deceptively simple art direction. If the voting members of the Academy screw it up, we can hope that Annie Awards voters will right their wrongs in January! It might be asking too much, but it's the holiday season after all, and we're all allowed to dream!



*Ratatouille vs. Atonement =  
A Good Oscar Race!*

*Ramin*

Ramin Zahed  
Editor-in-Chief  
[rzahed@animationmagazine.net](mailto:rzahed@animationmagazine.net)

## Quote of the Month

"Did you ever notice that most of the classic Hanna-Barbera cartoon characters often wear ties, cuffs, hats or vests...but never pants?!"



—Cartoon Network's press release for Boomerang's 24-hour marathon of "No Undies Mondays" in November.

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**“‘Bee Movie’ delivers. This is a beautifully animated, cleverly executed, warm and funny adventure. It’s well written and wonderfully voiced... the attention to detail in each and every scene is just amazing.”**

**Richard Roeper – EBERT & ROEPER**



## FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

**Best Animated Feature**

Produced by: Jerry Seinfeld – Christina Steinberg

**Best Film Editing**

Nick Fletcher, A.C.E.

**Best Director**

Simon J. Smith – Steve Hickner

**Best Sound Mixing**

Andy Nelson – Anna Behlmer

**Best Original Screenplay**

Jerry Seinfeld and Spike Feresten &  
Barry Marder & Andy Robin

**Best Art Direction**

Production Designer: Alex McDowell, RDI  
Art Director & Character Design: Christophe Lautrette

**Best Original Score**

Rupert Gregson-Williams

**Best Sound Editing**

Supervising Sound Editors:  
Will Files – Michael Silvers

**Best Visual Effects**

Visual Effects Supervisor: Doug Cooper

**Best Costume Design**

Jane Poole



 DREAMWORKS

# BEE MOVIE



## The Animation Planner

## January

**1** If you crave ridiculous car chases and gun play, check out Clive Owen and Paul Giamatti in the movie *Shoot 'Em Up*, out today on DVD and Blu-Ray.



**7-10** Take in all the new tech wonders and inventions at the **Consumer Electronics Show** in Vegas ([www.cesweb.org](http://www.cesweb.org)).



**8** A couple of Warner Bros. animated favorites are getting their moments in the sun on DVD today: *All-New Super Friends Hour, Season 1, Volume 1* and *What's New Scooby-Doo? The Complete Third Season*.



**11** Get ready for some faith-based CG animation as director Mike Nawrocki brings his latest, *The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything: A VeggieTales Movie*, to theaters Stateside. Also out today: Uwe Boll tries his hand at directing again with the sword-and-sorcery adventure, *In the Name of the King: A Dungeon Siege Tale*, starring Jason Statham and Ray Liotta.

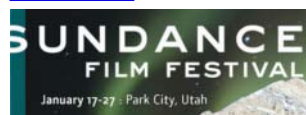


**15** The 2nd Annual Aniboom Awards are announced today on the web ([www.aniboom.com](http://www.aniboom.com)). Entry deadline is Dec. 15, 2007. *Star Wars* fans will be delighted (and possibly offended) by the release of the spoof *Family Guy Presents: Blue Harvest* on DVD today. Also out: *Storm Hawks - Hawks Rise Again* and *Tales From The Atmos* DVDs.

**15-20** The Italian city of Bologna hosts the **Future Film Festival** ([www.futurefilmfestival.org](http://www.futurefilmfestival.org)).



**17-27** Get your fix of all things indie and animated at the world-famous **Sundance Film Festival** in Park City, Utah ([www.sundance.org/festival](http://www.sundance.org/festival)). You can also discover some cool projects at the **Annual Slamdance Film Festival** ([www.slamdance.com](http://www.slamdance.com)) thru the 25th.



**18** If you're a fan of *Lost*, you'll probably want to check out J.J. Abrams' latest movie, *Cloverfield*—previously shrouded in secrecy and referred to as *Untitled J.J. Abrams*! We know it's set in New York City has some sort of crazy monster/apocalyptic storyline and is directed by *Felicity* alum Matt Reeves.

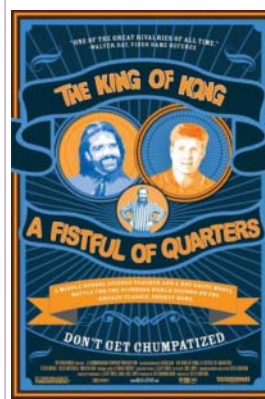


**19-20** Canuck game enthusiasts and animators will be heading over to the ever-expanding **Game Design Expo** in Vancouver today ([gamedesignexpo.com](http://gamedesignexpo.com)).

**22** It's time to catch up with all 13 episodes of the BBC America favorite series *Torchwood: The Complete First Season*, which makes its DVD premiere today in stores.



**29** You should really check out this great documentary about two videogame fanatics competing to break the world record in *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters*, out on DVD today.



**30** Yes, they do other things besides gambling and yachting in Monte Carlo. Today, for example, the glam city hosts **IMAGINA 2008**, an event dedicated to CG arts and industries ([www.imagina.fr](http://www.imagina.fr)).





# 2 NEW NICKTOONS!



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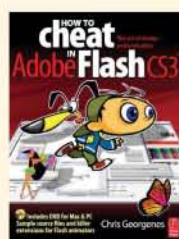
## Books We Love



### Out of Picture Volume I: Art from the Outside Looking in

By Blue Sky Studio Artists and Animators  
(Villard Books, \$19.95)

It was the perfect idea for a cool graphic book: Let's have the animators and artists working in a studio each come up with their own original graphic short stories once production on their movie is winding down. That's the premise behind *Out of Picture*, the beautiful new 160-page anthology created by the talented folks at Blue Sky Studio. Featuring bold, personal tales by Andrea Blasich, Benoit le Pennec, Daniel López Muñoz, David Gordon, Dice Tsutsumi, Greg Couch, Michael Knapp, Nash Dunnigan, Peter de Seve, Robert MacKenzie and Vincent Nguyen, and a nice forward by studio founder Chris Wedge, this fascinating volume is as eclectic and diverse as its artists' styles and personal visions. Addressing topics such as media immersion, terrorism, 21st century angst and facing personal demons, this book is the ultimate antidote to the cookie-cutter, decided-by-committee stories that end up making it to movie houses and TV screens. The fact that this is only the first volume in the collection gives us a lot of hope for the future of the medium.



subjects—from walk cycles and lip sync to bitmap animation, drop shadow, warping and yes, that always-in-demand *Star Wars*-style lettering! It also teaches readers how to customize Flash with extensions to enhance workflow. When old-school animators complain about the shortcomings of Flash, we want to make them all sit down and read this book and play around with the DVD it comes with. The author is that rare breed—he knows his stuff, and he presents his material in a colorful, user-friendly manner, which is actually fun to read!

### Cereal Killers

By Various Artists  
(Von Kreep Industries \$35.99)

How can you resist a "Coffin Table" art book put together by a mad genius who calls himself Doktor Viktor Von Kreep? Von Kreep is the mastermind behind a new book called *Cereal Killers*, which features over 70 beautiful illustrations by artists and animators such as Lou Romano, Ben Balistreri, Chris Savino, Sandra Equihua, Eddie Mort, Lili Chin, Gabe Swarr, Kup Kake, Steve Lambe, and Miah Alcorn, Chris Reccardi, Dan Thompson, Richard Wake, Eric Tan and Rob Lilly—each centering on some sort of a monster with a macabre breakfast cereal tie-in! Von Kreep, a horror movie and animation aficionado, has a clever sense of humor, and his enterprise is something we can all sink our teeth into. Featuring a nice intro by Maxwell Atoms (*Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy*), the book arrives a couple of months after Halloween, but hey, we can always stock up for next year! For more info, visit [www.kreepsvilleindustries.com](http://www.kreepsvilleindustries.com). ■



—Ramin Zahed

### How to Cheat in Flash CS3:

#### The Art of Design and Animation in Adobe Flash CS3

By Chris Georgenes  
(Focal Press, \$39.95)

When this book hit the stores a few months ago, it created a lot of buzz within the animation community. Georgenes manages to pack a lot of useful info for newcomers to the world of Flash in this handy volume, which covers a range of



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**Best Animated Feature**

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*Craig Outhier / The Orange County Register*

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# Hot Off the Truck

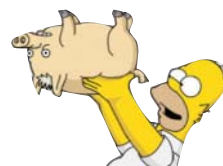
The following collectibles are among the most popular new arrivals on [entertainmentearth.com](http://entertainmentearth.com) this month:

1. McFarlane Hydra Dragon Clan 12-Inch Figure
2. Bettie Page Statue
3. Star Trek Wrath of Khan U.S.S. Enterprise Replica
4. Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season 8 #7 Comic Book
5. Futurama Bright 'n Shiny Bender
6. Droopy the Dog Bobble Head
7. Monty Python Black Knight Talking Plush
8. Aliens vs. Predator Omnibus Vol. 1 Graphic Novel
9. Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season 8 # 6 Comic Book
10. The Simpsons Lard Lad Deluxe Boxed Set

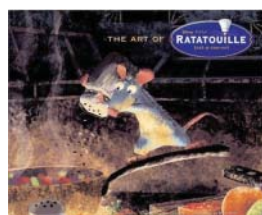


# 10 DVDs We Love

- Ratatouille** (Disney)  
**Looney Tunes: Golden Collection, Vol. 5** (Warner Bros.)  
**Disney Treasures: Chronological Donald, Vol. 3** (Disney)  
**The Jungle Book: 40th Anniv. Platinum Ed.** (Disney)  
**Meet the Robinsons** (Disney)  
**Paprika** (Sony)  
**Pixar Short Film Collection, Vol.1** (Disney)  
**The Simpsons Movie** (Fox)  
**Futurama: Bender's Big Score** (Fox)  
**Peanuts Holiday Collection** (Paramount)



# 10 Must-Have Books of 2007



## The Art of Ratatouille

By Karen Paik, John Lasseter, Brad Bird (Chronicle Books, \$40)

## Once Upon a Time: Walt Disney—The Sources of Inspiration for the Disney Studios

By Bruno Girveau (Prestel, \$75)

## To Infinity and Beyond!: The Story of Pixar

By Karen Paik and Leslie Iwerks (Chronicle Books, \$75)

## The Astro Boy Essays

By Frederik L. Schodt (Stone Bridge, \$16.95)

## Schulz and Peanuts: A Biography

By David Michaelis (Harper, \$34.95)

## The Hanna-Barbera Treasury

By Jerry Beck (Insight, \$45)

## Not Just Cartoons: Nicktoons!

By Jerry Beck (DK Adult, \$40)

## Shrek: The Art of the Quest

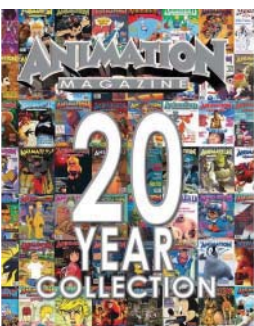
By Kathleen Jones (Insight, \$45)

## Secrets of Oscar-Winning Animation

By Olivier Cotte (Focal Press, \$34.95)

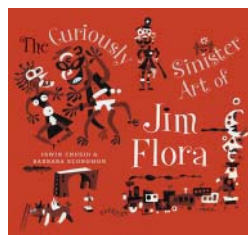
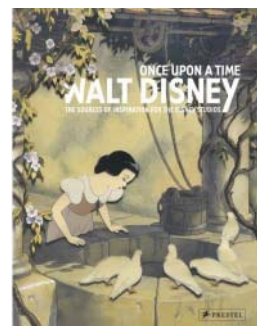
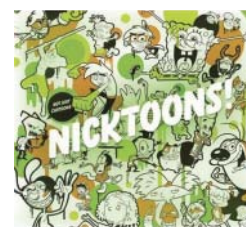
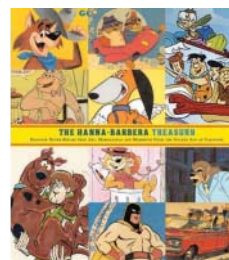
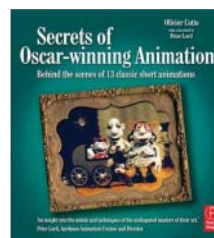
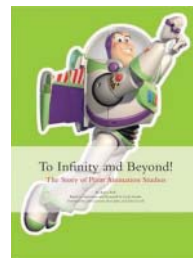
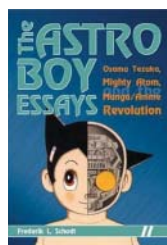
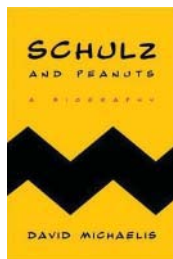
## The Curiously Sinister Art of Jim Flora

By Irwin Chusid, Barbara Economon (Fantagraphics, \$34.95)



## \* Special Mention! Animation Magazine: 20-Year Collection

By John Lasseter, Sylvain Chomet, Craig McCracken, John Canemaker, Bill Plympton, Nancy Cartwright, Leonard Maltin, John Knoll, Charles Solomon, Jean and Terry Thoren, Ryan Ball, Ramin Zahed and others. (Animation Magazine, \$45)





# Mr. Sporn in the Spotlight

The celebrated New York animator's work is the focus of special shows at Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art. **by Jake Friedman**

Last month, New York's Museum of Modern Art showcased the films of animator Michael Sporn, creator of award-winning short films and a staple of the New York animation community for more than 25 years.

"My films are based more on human traits than they are on cartoon traits," says Sporn, who may be recognized by his many adaptations of children's books in a drawn and painterly style. Sporn is in a very real sense a 2D animator, relishing the grit and tooth of pen and paint on tactile media. His efforts have not gone unrecognized. Besides numerous DVD sales and airings on PBS's *Sesame Street* and on HBO, Sporn garnered an Oscar nom for his take on *Shrek* author William Steig's *Doctor De Soto*. His recent 9/11 children's story, *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*, has also gone to win multiple awards worldwide.

The exhibit, installed by MoMA's animation enthusiast Josh Siegel, contained four programs highlighting the 61-year-old animator's career. Three of the programs focused on themes of animal tales, fables and New York City itself. The fourth show, part of the on-going MoMA Monday program, included a live discussion between Sporn and local animation heavyweight John Canemaker.

Canemaker's Oscar-winning animation style is not unlike Sporn's homespun artistry. "Besides John Canemaker interviewing me, I'll also show some new shorts I've done over the summer and part of an animatic for the upcoming feature film *Poe*, which I'm working on right now."

Sporn's most recent projects, which he produced with the assistance of Matthew Clinton, are *Pab's First Burger* and *Gertrude on the Beach*, both about the elite artist community cultivated by Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas in the 20th century. "The first is about Picasso trying his first hamburger," says Sporn. "It was after Tom Hachtman's art, done in watercolor. The second one is done in crayon."

The animatic for Sporn's feature film in progress, *Poe*, was drawn by seasoned pro Tissa David and takes artistry similarly as seriously. "Poe



Michael Sporn

looks like early Picasso," says Sporn. "The stories themselves are very expressionistic, in an etching style with a lot of scratches and dark lines. It's a rougher, looser style; good illustration, but not a realistic illustration style."

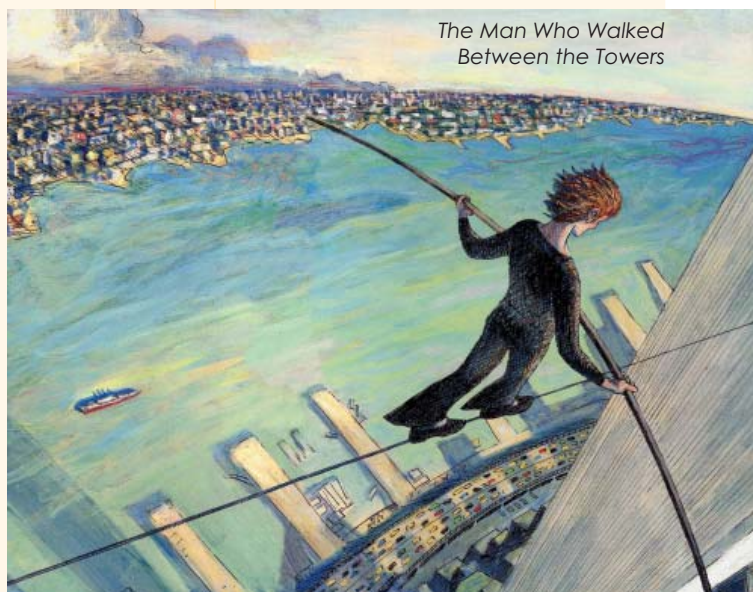
Sporn's approach to animation has been unique in the business, producing films that perhaps speak more to the heart than your average Saturday morning cartoon. "I'm interested in adult themes and social values, and even for films for the youngest possible audience, I still put those values in, whether about homelessness, social integration or ethnicity. I'm not ripping heads off characters or being foul-mouthed; I see no need for that."

It may have been the work of the Hubley Studio that inspired Sporn's style at the start of his career. After studying art at the New York Institute of Technology—before animation courses were offered there—he taught himself everything he needed to know about animation. He recalls, "John Hubley was one of my animation heroes. I was calling the studio almost every week, at the suggestion of the personal assistant there. I had conversations with her for about a year, and then one day I got a call from her to come in. So I was hired for two days, which turned into five years." It was there that Sporn worked on *Everybody Rides the Carousel* and *A Doonesbury Special*, as well as forging a professional relationship with Tissa David. "I worked for a couple of commercial companies in between, and when I found out that Richard Williams was doing *Raggedy Ann & Andy*, Tissa got me a job there. Richard Williams was another hero of mine back in '76."

At Richard Williams' studio, Sporn man-

aged a group of 150 assistants for the good part of a year. In the late '70s Sporn worked with R.O. Blechman pre-Ink Tank, hired to do the one-hour program *Simple Gifts*. However, plenty of time was spent working on commercials, which Sporn found less than desirable. "I was sort of running the studio; there weren't many people there at the time, and I realized that I could do this for myself. So I left Blechman in 1980 to form my own company."

Working in the New York indie scene has had its ups and downs for Sporn. "Norm McLaren once said that his suggestion to all independent filmmakers was to have their budgets cut in half; striving for something will



give them more of an objective need to fight to make the film better. I agree with that." Sporn adds, "Unless you're clever and agile, money will be a major problem all the time. I would say 60 percent of my job is worrying about finances. You also have to be able to get your work seen and shown off."

Sporn's films have been shown internationally, a fact that he coughs up to his high values. "I like intelligent and adult work. I like a pencil dragging across a piece of paper and the problems you get with that. It's beautiful." ■

**Jake Friedman is a New York-based animator and journalist. You can find out more about him at [www.jakefriedman.net](http://www.jakefriedman.net).**



# There Will Be Ketchup

*Aqua Teen Hunger Force Makes its Console Debut.*

by Ryan Ball

**F**rylock, Meatwad and Master Shake have built a dedicated following on TV and even starred in their own big-screen movie, but now they're out to conquer a whole new medium and this time you get to play a part in the mayhem. Developed by Creat Studios and published by Midway Games, *Aqua Teen Hunger Force: Zombie Ninja Pro-Am* for PlayStation 2 offers fans of the [adult swim] animated series a chance to battle Carl, the Mooninites, MC Pee Pants, the Plutonians and other villains as their favorite trio of fast-food menu items.

Written and voiced by series creators Dave Willis and Matt Maiellaro, the golf combat game gets underway when Frylock is admitted into Jersey Pines, South Jersey's most prestigious and exclusive public golf course. Jealousy gets the best of Master Shake, who enlists Meatwad as his caddy and sets out to beat his goateed roommate on the links. Of course, things get out of hand and carnage ensues as players battle their way to the ball after each shot, using their irons as weapons or their swords as clubs. Gamers are encouraged to drive their golf carts with reckless abandon and tear up the turf as they race the Frat Aliens through obstacles and over jumps with weapons in play.



Game producer Devin Shatsky tells us that Willis, Maiellaro and series producer Ned Hastings were very involved with the development process, reviewing builds in progress and providing extensive feedback along the way. "They worked very closely with our cinematics director on making sure all the camera angles, cuts and timing were done properly," Shatsky recalls. "The timing is a crucial element in nailing the Aqua Teen style of humor, and their involvement was an absolute necessity."

Capturing the show's unique sense of humor re-

quired cramming a lot of voice-over work into the game, which pushed streaming and memory limitations, and proved to be one of the chief hurdles for the creators. Maiellaro and Willis wrote more than 3,000 lines of character dialogue for the gameplay, as well as hour's

worth of absurd, non sequitur comedy gold for the menus alone. "We liked to joke around that for their \$29 the fans are getting a nice Aqua Teen DVD experience, with a bonus game included," says Shatsky.

Emulating the look and feel of the show's low-tech 2D animation in a 3D game also proved challenging for the Creat team. Shatsky says the key was keeping it simple and resisting the natural urge to make the animation actually look good. The animators had the most fun with slovenly landlord Carl, whom Master Shake bludgeons with a golf club within the first two minutes of the game. Using Meatwad as the golf ball was a close second favorite.

Since a good number of the people involved with the development of the game are Aqua Teen fans, everyone was pretty much on the same page from start to finish, according to Shatsky. "One thing's for sure," he notes, "there was never a shortage of material when we were designing this game. The hard part was actually narrowing it down to keep the scope of the game realistic."

While they wreak havoc on the golf course, players can unlock exclusive bonus content, including a never-before-seen episode of Aqua Teen Hunger Force. When pressed for details, Shatsky would only offer, "It's got a little bit of everything—drama, suspense, romance and, without a doubt, the most riveting sandwich battle you've ever seen." ■

**Aqua Teen Hunger Force: Zombie Ninja Pro-Am is now available for PlayStation 2. Visit the official website at [www.aquateengame.com](http://www.aquateengame.com).**

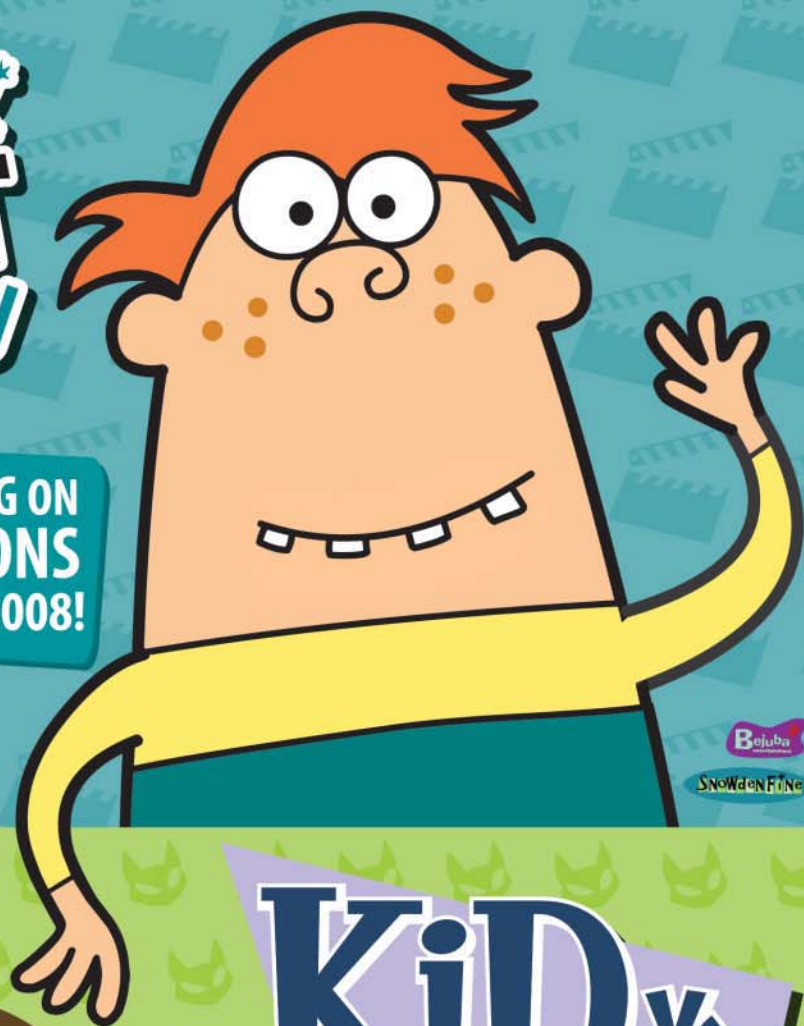


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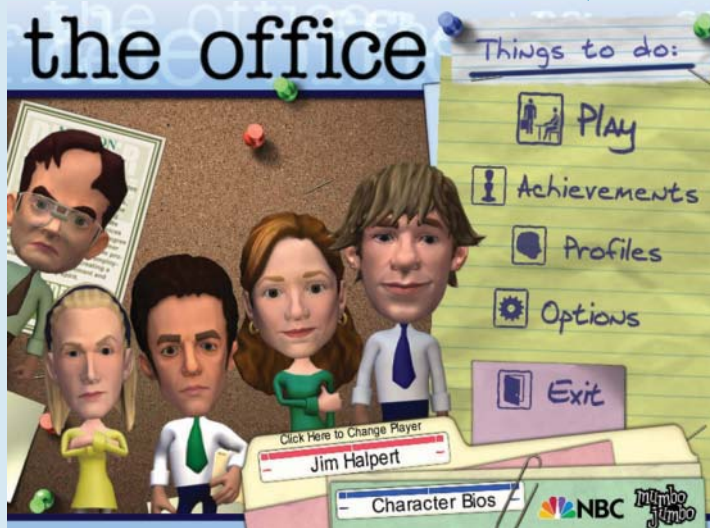
MumboJumbo Brings NBC's Hit Comedy *The Office* to the PC. by Ryan Ball

What does it take to become the top salesperson at Dunder Mifflin Paper Company? Fans of *The Office* on NBC can now find out if they have skills to hang with Dwight Schrute and the rest of their favorite paper pushers with *The Office*, a casual game developed and published by MumboJumbo. Will Jim and Pam make it work in the love department? Who cares, there's 20lbs of Inkjet stock to sell!

Over the course of a virtual year, players will compete against their eccentric, computer-controlled co-workers to make the sale and get brownie points with the corporate office. In addition to gathering the necessary items to complete the order, employees can execute outrageous and resourceful pranks such as trapping an opponent's cell phone in Jell-O or stashing a co-worker's wallet in the vending machine.

*The Office*'s main cast members have all been animated as big-headed avatars to help bring comic authenticity to the game. In addition, one of the show's key writers, Anthony Ferrell, wrote an introductory story that sets the tone and lets the player know how the game is played. His involvement ensured that dialogue between the established characters rings true for avid viewers of the series.

"In developing a game that was based on such a popular brand, versus creating one from scratch, we had to work hard to ensure we did not stray from the true essence of the show," says Matt Lichtenwalter, VP of product development at MumboJumbo. "We had to constantly keep ourselves in check to make sure we were always



in sync with what fans of the show have come to know and love."

Lichtenwalter tells us that most of the environment work was modeled and rendered in LightWave, while character artists used Autodesk's 3ds Max to rough out the general shape of each actor's head before transitioning to Mudbox for the detail work. The animators used Maya for character rigging and animation, then brought everything back into Max for lighting and rendering. The transition between Max and Maya was facilitated by FILMBOX, which eliminates many of the problems associated with using multiple 3D packages.

Creating expressive animation was

challenging given the limitations of games created for download. "Animations must be short, yet deliver the message effectively," Lichtenwalter explains. "Our animators worked closely with the game designer to make sure each animation served a purpose and complemented the gameplay."

Lichtenwalter says the game offers a lot of fun elements for regular *Office* watchers and the uninitiated alike. He thinks players will be especially fond of all the pranks, which are mostly inspired by actual hi-jinx featured on the show. There are a total of 14 pranks to pull off in the game, and each rival has two or three that are special to him or her. Players can snicker as Michael

hops around in pain after burning his foot on a grill, or get an edge on Ryan when he catches a football and is unexpectedly tackled to the ground by Dwight.

*The Office* has no doubt inspired some real practical joking in cubicles across North America and the U.K., where the show has its roots. Now desk jockeys at least have a virtual outlet for good-natured mischief, though bosses may find employees spending a little too much time at Dunder Mifflin on company time. That's all fine and dandy for the folks at MumboJumbo, as long as fans keep coming back for more. (That's what she said). ■

**Having carved out a nice foothold in the exploding casual games market, MumboJumbo is currently expanding into the console arena with games created for PlayStation 2, PSP, Nintendo DS and Wii, while continuing to create PC titles like *The Office*. The game is rated E for everyone and is now available at retail. It can also be downloaded at [www.mumbojumbo.com](http://www.mumbojumbo.com) and other leading gaming sites.**



A vibrant, cartoonish poster for the 'mytoons BUMPER BLASTOFF CONTEST!'. The background is a deep blue space filled with white stars of various sizes. In the upper left, a small green rocket with orange flames is shown in flight. A large, light blue rocket ship with a red nose cone and a red stripe along its side dominates the right side of the image. Its hatch is open, revealing a set of grey stairs. In the foreground, two cartoon characters stand on a yellow, cratered surface. On the left is a grey alien with a single antenna, wearing a green jumpsuit with a silver rocket engine on its back and red boots. On the right is a large, blue, blob-like creature with a prominent, rounded rear. The text 'mytoons' is in a small, white, lowercase font. 'BUMPER BLASTOFF' is in large, bold, white letters with red outlines and a green glow effect. 'CONTEST!' is in smaller, white, bold letters with a red outline. In the upper right, '\$7000' is written in large, yellow, outlined numbers, with 'in cash prizes!' in red below it. A diagonal line of text reads 'Special Judges: INTERSPECTACULAR, creators of shorts for Comedy Central™ and NickToons™'. At the bottom, there is a section for 'THE MISSION', 'THE REWARD', and a call to action to see complete rules and enter by 1.21.08 at www.mytoons.com/blastoff. The mytoons.com logo is in the bottom right corner.

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# The Fine Art of Crafting Digital Daemons

It took an army of vfx wizards and the joint forces of six major shops to realize the fantastic universe of Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass*. **by Barbara Robertson**

When British author Philip Pullman (*His Dark Materials* trilogy) created a parallel universe for his heroine Lyra Belacqua's epic quest, he gave every human in his novels a companion daemon—an animal that represents his or her soul. The witch queen Serafina Pekkala, for example, has a grey goose named Kaisa. Mrs. Marisa Coulter, the head of the General Oblation Board, a golden monkey. And, because Lyra is a child, her daemon, Pantalaimon (Pan for short) still has many shapes. Pan might be a moth, a cat that sits on her shoulder, a ferret that rides in her pocket, a sparrow or another animal that reflects her inner spirit.

In New Line Cinema's feature adaptation, *The Golden Compass*, these animals and many of the environments they act in are entirely digital. To create the epic visual effects for director Chris Weitz's adaptation of the first book of the trilogy, six effects studios combined their efforts under the supervision of Mike Fink. All told, the effects crews created 99.9 percent of the daemons—that's warthogs, jackals, rabbits, foxes, birds, cats, snow leopards,



wolves and many more. "There are furry animals in every scene interacting with people and the environments," he says.

Two of the leading actors are white polar bears, always CG, and often in an all-digital snowy environment. They and 10 of the daemon animals have speaking roles, with Pan in his various forms also stepping—or flying—into a starring role.

The primary studios working on *Compass* were Rhythm & Hues, Framestore CFC and Cinesite, with Digital Domain, Tippett Studio and Rainmaker also contributing effects, environments and animation. These studios shared around a third of the 1,100 visual effects shots in the film, often with as many as three studios working on one shot. During the pivotal Bolvangar battle scenes, four facilities contributed elements to the same shots.

At Rhythm & Hues, a crew of 400 created 500 shots: Pan in all his forms, all the other hero daemons and the only ones

"Our two biggest challenges were providing a digital co-star for the film and that the shots were complex. We had white furry bears walking in deep snow in 3D environments and, in some shots, hundreds of guard bears in suits of armor."

—Cinesite vfx supervisor Ben Morris





**Bear Essentials:** The beautifully animated polar bears of Philip Pullman's trilogy are part of the 1,100 vfx shots created by Rhythm & Hues, Framestore CFC, Cinesite, Digital Domain, Tippett Studio and Rainmaker for *The Golden Compass*.



that talk, the mechanical spy flies and several hundred complex shots for a final sequence that production pulled when they decided to stop the story at an earlier point. Cinesite's crew of 100 managed 350 shots with a supporting cast of daemons, multiple environments—some entirely CG—and several vehicles. The two largest CG stars of the show, the armored polar bears, came to life at Framestore CFC, where around 240 people worked on 260 shots with lorek and his nemesis Ragnar, more than 100 guard bears and a snowy environment in which a dramatic bear fight takes place.

Bill Westenhofer, who led crews working in Rhythm & Hues' Los Angeles and Mumbai facilities, cites the interaction of people with their daemons as the most challenging part of their work. "We've done work like this before—for example, when Lucy touches Aslan in *Narnia*—but we cranked up the amount of interaction on this film."

In one shot, Lyra (Dakota Blue Richards) picks up Pan, who is a cat in this scene, and holds him against her head. "In the past, we would have freaked out with a shot like that, but this time, we just replaced the side of her head with digital hair," Westenhofer says. "I think back to *Cats & Dogs*, the struggle we had just to get hair in there. I'm really proud of the level we've reached in creating real CG characters."

Westenhofer's favorite shot is one of Lyra looking through the lens of a projector at Pan, who has shape-shifted into a ferret. "She sticks her tongue out at him and he sticks his tongue out at her," he says. "My six-year-old made me play that shot about 60 times."

With few exceptions, the artists built, animated and rendered the daemons to look like real animals, albeit talking animals in some cases. Mrs. Coulter's (Nicole Kidman) golden monkey, which doesn't talk,

is an exception; it has no counterpart in the real world, and its thick hair was the most technically challenging. Another exception: All the daemons' received a special shimmer of color on their coats to suggest these animals are spirits. This characteristic took months of research to perfect but Fink believes it was worth it. "It's not all that obvious in the movie," he says. "They're still photoreal. But, when you look at the daemons, there's a subtle difference."

The daemons always stay close to their humans until, in the film, the Oblation Board makes a horrific decision: It decides to separate the children from their daemons. To realize their nefarious goal, they kidnap Lyra's friend Roger Parslow (Ben Walker) and other children.

Lyra enlists the help of John Faa (Jim Carter), king of the Gyptians, a skilled aeronaut balloonist named Lee Scoresby (Sam Elliott) and Scoresby's best friend,





**A Witch in Flight:** Serafina Pekkala (portrayed by actress Eva Green) takes flight against a breath-taking landscape, created digitally by Cinesite.

lorek Byrnison (Sir Ian McKellen's voice), an intelligent, armor-wearing polar bear with opposable thumbs from the Arctic island of Svalbard. Their quest to free the children takes Lyra far into the north, to Bolvangar, where a battle takes place.

Because in theory every person in the film has a daemon, for the Bolvangar battle Rhythm & Hues used Massive to animate hundreds of background daemons. For shots in which people closer to camera appear with their CG daemons, and for other shots of non-talking daemons

where." Similarly, Cinesite created Lyra's stylized Oxford, a fantasy version of London, and other environments, built Mrs. Coulter's carriage in 3D, a sailing ship and Lee Scoresby's flying ship made from multiple hot air balloons.

But Bolvangar was, arguably, the most complex shot for Cinesite and for the production as a whole, as Fink explains. "We had shots with the entire background by Digital Domain, wolves animated by Tippett Studio and bears by Framestore CFC. We had shots where we layered daemons

dreds of guard bears in suits of armor."

Those hundreds of bears ring an arena in which lorek fights Ragnar (Ian McShane's voice) to the death, a scene previs'd using a scale model of Ragnar's palace and arena, one-inch cardboard bears and a lipstick camera.

During another sequence, Lyra rides on the back of lorek, a feat made possible by an "M-Rig," a motion control rig driven by animation data that Morris designed for *Dinotopia* and used for the *Harry Potter* hippogriff sequence.

At Weitz and Fink's direction, animators underplayed the human side of lorek, and tried to imagine how a bear would talk. "He's basically a serious guy ... or bear," says Dadi Einarsson, animation supervisor. "When he and Lyra have touching moments you don't have to do a lot to make him feel emotional, because any variation becomes significant."

Fink cites the bears, the interaction of daemons with people and the environment and the environments themselves as work that pushes the state of the art for visual effects in this film. If the goal of visual effects is to support a story, what better way than to create a believable parallel universe that envelops audience members and takes them on an epic quest, and how else could that be done than with splendid visual effects? ■

**New Line Cinema's *The Golden Compass* opens in U.S. theaters on Dec. 7.**

"We had shots with the entire background by Digital Domain, wolves animated by Tippett Studio and bears by Framestore CFC. We had shots where we layered daemons from Rhythm & Hues and bears from Framestore CFC over backgrounds from Cinesite that also had wolves from Cinesite or Tippett or Rhythm & Hues."

—Mike Fink, vfx supervisor for *The Golden Compass*

throughout the film, Cinesite created the characters; some 15 different animals including a raccoon, praying mantis, rats, beetles and a raven.

Cinesite also created a huge digital environment for the Bolvangar battle that included an elaborate Art Deco 3D building surrounded with matte paintings and images projected onto geometry from HD footage that Fink shot from a helicopter in the Arctic. "They shot the sequence on a football pitch with white paper snow and a 360-degree greenscreen," says Sue Rowe, visual effects supervisor. "We created a 360-degree environment so they could point the [virtual] camera any-

from Rhythm & Hues and bears from Framestore CFC over backgrounds from Cinesite that also had wolves from Cinesite or Tippett or Rhythm & Hues." In addition, Cinesite created background doubles for crowds of people and flying witches.

For many of the shots that included the polar bears, however, Framestore CFC created the environments as well as the bears. "Our two biggest challenges were providing a digital co-star for the film and that the shots were complex," says Ben Morris, visual effects supervisor. "We had white furry bears walking in deep snow in 3D environments and, in some shots, hun-





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# Still Squeaky After All These Years

The trio of singing critters gets a CG makeover and a brand new movie adventure in Fox's holiday package, *Alvin and the Chipmunks*.

by Michael Mallory

**P**roducer Ross Bagdasarian, Jr. could be excused for remembering getting the green light for the big-screen *Alvin and the Chipmunks* like it was yesterday. Compared to the usual development and production time for a major-studio animated feature, it was yesterday.

"In late January of this year, the folks at Twentieth Century Fox said, 'Could you get the movie done for December?'" says Bagdasarian, whose father Ross, Sr., created the rodent troika for the wildly successful, Grammy-grabbing novelty record *The Chipmunk Song* in 1958. "We said, 'Yeah, no problem, December 2008, that's perfect timing because it's the chipmunk's fiftieth anniversary.' They said, 'No...we mean *this* December.'" After Bagdasarian and his wife and creative/producing partner Janice Karman, who were responsible for the 1980s Chipmunk invasion on NBC, picked themselves off the floor, they decided to go for it.

Alvin now joins the roster of classic toons

like Casper, Scooby-Doo and Garfield who have been digitized in a live-action world. But it was seeing 1999's *Stuart Little*

that convinced Bagdasarian this was the perfect format for Alvin and crew, and he and Karman went to work on a script with *The Simpsons* writer Jon Vitti. That script languished at Fox for years until the studio realized that the big-screen adventures of Alvin, Simon, Theodore and their surrogate dad Dave Seville would be the perfect tent pole family follow-up to last year's surprise holiday smash *Night at the Museum*.

The big screen *Alvin and the Chipmunks* is the first version to present the trio as more-or-less realistic chipmunks rather than fuzzy little kids with beaver bites, and it offers the backstory of how they teamed up with David Seville (played by *My Name Is Earl* star Jason Lee), a struggling songwriter who becomes inspired by the musical little marmots.

Because of the insanely short time provided to take the film from draft script (ultimately augmented by writers Will McRobb and Chris Viscardi) to delivery, Fox decided to shortcut the proceedings by reassembling the same team that had just delivered *Garfield 2: A Tail of Two Kitties*; chiefly director Tim Hill, animation director Chris Bailey and the CG wizards at L.A.'s Rhythm & Hues. Their collective experience was invaluable since the time crunch did not even allow for completed storyboards.

[continued on page 24](#)





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**Critter Specialist:** Tim Hill, who co-wrote *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* and directed *Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties*, is no stranger to juggling projects featuring familiar animated characters.

Photo: Jamie Trueblood

here." Not just Alvin (voiced by Justin Long), but also Simon (Matthew Gray Gubler) and Theodore (Jesse McCartney) have had their personalities fleshed out and dimensionalized.

"People who know Alvin and the Chipmunks will come in thinking they have a favorite character," says Bailey, "but as you see the animation, everyone's favorite

character is going to shift."

Who could have guessed that Alvin and the Chipmunks would be one of those properties that had to wait for film technology to catch up to its creative potential? ■

**Michael Mallory is an award-winning Los Angeles writer who specializes in animation and vfx. You can find more information about him at [www.michaelmallory.com](http://www.michaelmallory.com).**

**Fox releases Alvin and The Chipmunks in theaters nationwide on December 14 and the U.K. on December 21.**

# Alvin and The Chipmunks continued from page 24

"There's a pretty physical comic sequence where the Chipmunks are being chased by [backstage] security guards, and Alvin stands on a light and blinds the guard, and Theodore's running on top of a big base drum and mows the guards down, and Simon lets a sandbag drop on another guy, maybe 10 little vignettes that had not been storyboarded," Hill says. "I had to just make it up, pretty much."

Not every shortcut was taken, however. For a big chipmunk dance number set to Bagdasarian pere's hit song *Witch Doctor*, a team of dancers were hired to perform it, but only for reference. Those chipmunk feet got happy solely through the skills of the animators, not mo-cap.

To help the actors and crew out for the 400-plus animation shots, Bailey was on the set every day helping to stage the scenes with the use of small stick puppets called "stuffies." "We would stick the stuffies in a shot and I would do a quick little tracing on the monitor with a dry erase marker," says Bailey. "Then when we'd watch the actors perform with the characters, we'd make sure that while following the actor the cameraman was also keeping enough space for the animators' characters to work in as well."

Bailey praises the skill of actors Lee and Ian Cross, who plays the villain of the piece—an unscrupulous music mogul—in matching their movements to tiny

scampering figures that weren't yet there, though Hill notes that every now and then the challenge of it became overwhelming. "One day Jason turned to me in the middle of a take and said, 'I can't believe it, I'm talking to a coffee table!'" he says.

The filmmakers feel longtime fans of the Chipmunks will be amazed by the depth of character that was achieved through the digital animation. "People will see vulnerability in Alvin that they have not seen much of before," Bagdasarian says. "Generally, the [earlier television] animation has not been able to give us the kind of nuance that we have



**Nutty Trio:** Originally created by the late Ross Bagdasarian, who came up with the 1958 hit song "The Chipmunk Song," Alvin, Simon and Theodore have had many incarnations, including a 2D animated series (1983-1988) and the 1987 movie *The Chipmunk Adventure*.





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# Southwestern Passage

Majestic Arizona landscapes, Native American mythology and a cool selection of exotic animals are some of the appealing ingredients in the upcoming CG-animated indie, *The Legend of Secret Pass*.

**A**lmost three years ago, David Lords, the man who made Arizona's Laughlin Ranch into one of the major ecologically sustainable reserves in the country and author Erik D. Stoop approached producer James Costello to spearhead an animated movie set in the scenic region which uses native myths and animals. Joining forces with veteran producers Chris Henderson (*Return to Never Land*, *Clifford's Really Big Movie*) and director Steve Trenbirth (*Jungle Book 2*), and

(voiced by Graham Greene)—a wise Shaman—in discovering his destiny as a "Guardian" and helping him battle a dark force known as Calabar (voice of Michael Chiklis) who is returning to Spirit Mountain.

"We wanted to create a world that had its own rules and mythologies—a new, unexplored place where you can get lost," says Costello. "Our target audience is a bit older than the usual children's animated movies—from the very beginning, we wanted to make a movie, not a cartoon; some-

thing that parents can enjoy as well, and a storyline that retells the ancient Thunderbird myth."

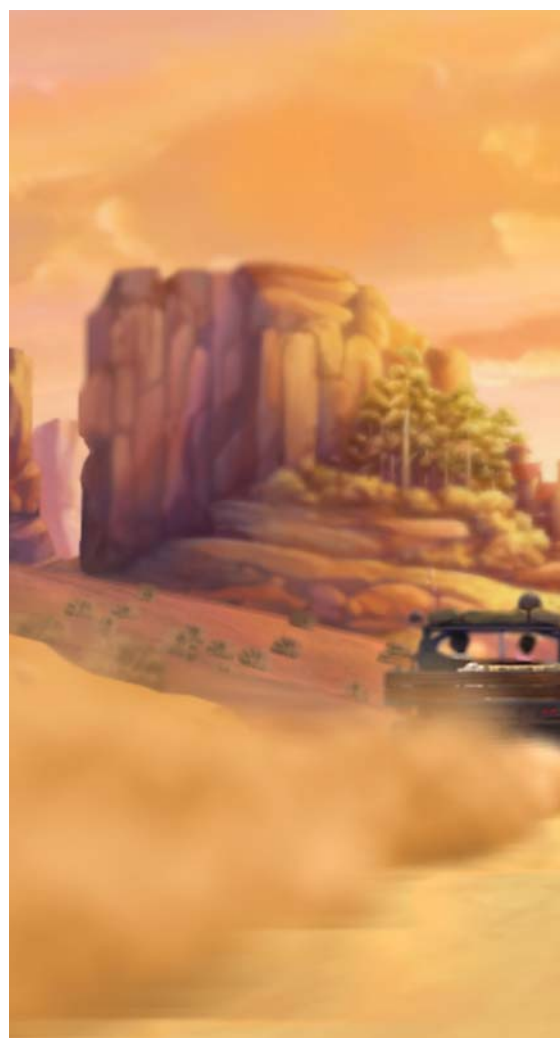
In the feature, the interactions between humans and animals are natural and organic—just as they are in ancient Indian folklore. In addition, the movie has a nice

multi-generational aspect, where Manu, his teenage cousin, her mom and the wise grandfather figure all work together to unlock the ancient mysteries and battle evil.

"We certainly didn't want to duplicate what other studios are doing," adds Costello. "Pixar makes great films. They have that niche covered. You could say that our goal was to make an animated *Raiders of the Lost Ark*-type adventure.

Billy Jones and his team at L.A.'s 310 Studios and Montreal-based Alan Best and his vfx shop Digital Dimension, the resourceful team is only a few months away from seeing the fruition of its dreams.

Last month, key members of the production team graciously invited *Animation Magazine* to see portions of their good-looking feature *The Legend of Secret Pass* at the swank quarters of 310 Studios in Glendale, Calif. The CG-animated epic centers on a young boy named Manu (voiced by Frankie Muniz) who is aided by his grandfather

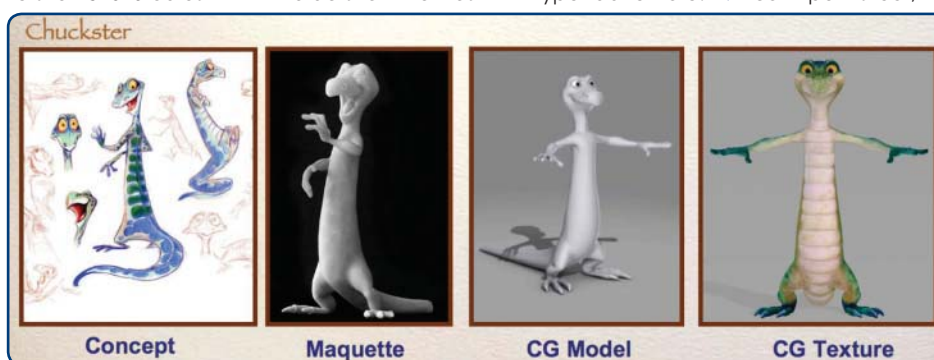


The film's humor isn't just slapstick, it comes from the animal characters and the way they're experiencing the adventure along with our hero."

Jones is referring to Manu's Southwest-specific animal pals—Ira the desert tortoise (Shelley Berman); Chuckster, the streetwise chuckwalla (a perfectly cast Joe Pantoliano); Bartholomew, the orphan chameleon (Billy Jones) and Qui Qui, the cute desert quail (Kim Mai Guest). That's right, kids, these aren't your average funny CG-animated animal sidekicks!

In addition to being largely influenced by native American myths, the movie reflects the vast landscapes of the American Southwest. As assistant director Woody Yocum points out, "Our art director Darren

Carney wanted the movie's landscape to have a painterly look. He brought a wonderful 2D sensibility to this CG-animated world. I think what we learned from the





**Uncharted Territory:** The upcoming CG-animated indie feature, *The Legend of Secret Pass*, offers beautifully rendered Arizona landscapes and various animal characters which are indigenous to the region.



Billy Jones



Chris Henderson



James Costello



Steve Trenbith  
(director)

experience was that it's possible to approach CG technology with a wider range of techniques. In a way, this painterly quality brings a whole new dramatic element to *Secret Pass*."

To bring the story to life, the producers went to Billy Jones and Craig Russo, who had worked on the three *BIONICLE* feature films, released by LEGO/Miramax. With their background in visual effects and both pre and post-production in animation, they were the perfect candidates to create the *Secret Pass* world with their cost-efficient CG pipeline, based on Softimage|XSI software solutions. Jones and Russo work closely with Alan Best and his team at Montreal's Digital Dimension house to deliver the detailed animation of the production.

"When we started out, our models for the animation quality were the *Ice Age* movies," says Henderson. "But as we moved further ahead in development, we realized that we were surpassing that first bar. One thing about producing a smaller independently produced movie is that

you have to move quickly. You have to keep the production flowing. Billy and Craig anticipated so many of the challenges from the beginning by building the pipelines that were going to be necessary further down the line."

Henderson, a veteran of several top-notch 2D-animated features and TV series, says the experience has been quite invaluable. "It basically proved to me that it was possible to deliver a movie like this using a virtual studio. It was the first time I saw a CG-animated world come to life from beginning to end."

For Benoit Girard, the movie's exec producer and CEO of Digital Dimension, what makes the film stand out is its special look. "We carefully combined traditional painting and artistic techniques seen in conventional films with the latest CGI techniques," says Girard. "We made serious efforts to stay away from the generic plastic-looking visuals in many other CG films."

Costing about one-fourth of a current CG-animated title, the movie certainly looks more expensive than the sum total of

its budget. An ensemble voice cast of recognizable stars, state-of-the-art sound design and Peter Kater's majestic score inspired by Native American music help push the movie to a higher playing field. If this is the future of indie animation, then the studios have their work cut out for them.

Jones sees various pluses in working in the indie arena. "For all practical purposes, we were left alone to deliver this world. We had the freedom to figure out quick solutions that best fit the CG world. In contrast to 2D animation, you don't have 80 years of features in the box to point you to the right direction. CGI is still a new medium. Many people are trying to get into this CG-animated field and some are struggling because they rely on the same methods and formulas. This was our chance to keep the indie spirit alive and put our own personal stamp on it." ■

**To learn about the movie, visit [www.legendofsecretpass.com](http://www.legendofsecretpass.com). The feature is expected to have a theatrical release this spring in the U.S.**



# Animation Magazine's Guide to the Oscars

Part 1 of 3



**Cast of Characters:** The 2007 list of Animated Feature Oscar contenders include, clockwise from top left, Tekkonkinkreet, Surf's Up, Bee Movie, Shrek the Third, Persepolis, Beowulf, The Simpsons Movie, Meet the Robinsons and Ratatouille

## The Year of the Rat

by Thomas J. McLean

This year's race is all about one film that critics, pundits and industry insiders think is almost guaranteed a nomination for the big prize, and several that spark more than a bit of controversy and perhaps even make some cinematic history.

First up is the sure thing: No one wants to bet against Disney-Pixar's *Ratatouille* being one of the three films the Academy will announce as Oscar nominees in the early morning hours of Jan. 22.

"I rarely if ever use the word 'shoo-in' when it comes to the Oscars be-

cause they're so unpredictable, but I would be very surprised if *Ratatouille* didn't earn a nomination, simply because, A) it's so good and B) it's a Pixar film and they've consistently honored those movies," says Leonard Maltin, the renowned film critic and author who has written several books on animation.

"If you look at its percentages at RottenTomatoes.com, [*Ratatouille*] not only has the best reviews of all animated movies this year, it has possibly the best review of all movies this year, peri-

od," agrees Tom O'Neil, a veteran awards prognosticator and columnist for [TheEnvelope.com](http://TheEnvelope.com).

But while director Brad Bird can start picking out his tux, the rest of the field will see at least three likely candidates from the qualifying list of 12 films vying for the other two nominations.

Of those films, the most enthusiasm is for *Persepolis*, an autobiographical film about cartoonist Marjane Satrapi's life growing up in Iran that was animated by hand in black and white. A hit on the festival circuit, the film's combina-



tion of a relevant story for adults and traditional esthetics make a compelling case for the film as an artistic achievement that likely will appeal to the nominating panel.

"I think the committee will probably go with it because it's different and it reminds everyone of when they first started doing animation in high school or college," says an awards observer. "They all kind of gravitate toward it on an artistic level."

A nomination for such a film is far from the long shot it might seem to be had the academy not nominated other foreign animated films, such as *The Triplets of Belleville* and the Oscar-winning *Spirited Away*.

*Persepolis*' shot at Oscar history comes from its submission as the official entry of France in the best foreign-language film category. (The film will be dubbed into English for its Dec. 25 release in the U.S.)

"It'll be interesting to see if the foreign-language committee, which is beset from many directions from people who complain about their choices, will accept or embrace such a radical idea, or what is for them a radical idea," Maltin says.

A different kind of history is possible for *Beowulf*. The 3-D retelling of the ancient myth was made with motion capture and qualifies as animation under the Academy's rules for the branch—even as its director, Robert Zemeckis, says in interviews that he does not consider this an animated film.

*The Hollywood Reporter* quoted Zemeckis as telling the IBC conference in September: "To call performance capture animation is a disservice to the great animators ... They draw a performance one frame at a time. Perfor-

mance capture uses everything that an actor does. It is digitized and translated to the scene."

But that may not matter according to Academy rules. The Zemeckis-produced motion-capture animated film *Monster House* was nominated last year, though that film's content and style resembled traditional American animation while *Beowulf* evokes the visual-effects fury of 300.

That seems to leave *Beowulf* in a precarious position. O'Neil says the performance capture issue will hurt the film's chances with members of the branch who believe that the movement of the characters must be imagined for something to qualify as animation.

Such arguments will prevent *Beowulf* from being nominated, Maltin says.

But should the film get one of the top three spots, its chances of winning may increase, O'Neil says. "Because the full membership of the Academy votes for the winner, the esoteric arguments are lost once the nominations are announced," he says.

Rounding out the list of likely contenders are some familiar faces nonetheless new to the big screen. *The Simpsons Movie* did well, but it remains to be seen if the response to either the film or the long-running TV franchise will be enough to snag a nomination.

"It may be that the sheer momentum of *The Simpsons* and the enormous good will that surrounds them and the people who make that series will carry it off to the Oscars," Maltin says.

Like the *Shrek* series, which with *Shrek the Third* seems likely to fulfill the law of diminishing returns after a win and a nomination, familiarity with *The Simpsons* may work against it.

"Maybe *The Simpsons Movie* is the most vulnerable in there, because it's

derivative of other material. But on the other hand it's such a strong movie that if they actually watch it, it's so well made, so heartfelt that it's a strong candidate to break through," says O'Neil.

A pack of mid-range movies appears to cluster together just beyond the reach of a nomination, a group that includes *Bee Movie*, *Meet the Robinsons*, *Shrek the Third* and *Surf's Up*.

"It's a tough call this year because I don't think even the fans of those movies would call those great films. I liked several of these films, but I don't think I could use the word outstanding," Maltin says.

Rounding out the eligibility list are the long shots, like *TMNT*, *Alvin and the Chipmunks* and the critically mauled *Aqua Teen Hunger Force Colon Movie Film for Theaters*, a film whose very submission seems like one of the off-beat show's jokes.

If there's a wildcard in the basement, it's *Tekkonkinkreet*, an anime-style film directed by an American that has die-hard fans in the anime community but low awareness even with the small animation community.

However the nominations play out, the post-nomination race will be its own wild game. *Ratatouille* has potential to run away with it early, but given the depth of the top contenders this year, it could be one of the most interesting races so far in the short history of the animated feature category. ■

**Tom McLean is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects, comic books and animation. He's also the man behind the popular comic-book blog *Bags and Boards* ([http://weblogs.variety.com/bags\\_and\\_boards](http://weblogs.variety.com/bags_and_boards)).**





# Company Town!

A look at some of the big animation and vfx studios, companies and properties celebrating anniversaries in '08.

## 55 Years:

### Woodsy Wild Things

**M**aurice Sendak, Mo Willems and William Steig are just a few of the well-loved children's authors who owe a tip of the hat to **Weston Woods Studios** for bringing their charming literary worlds to animated life. Though it is now a subsidiary of Scholastic, Weston Woods got its start in a log cabin in the woods of Weston, Connecticut (Get it?) when founder Morton Schindel decided to pursue his dream of bringing the illustrated storybooks that he and his children loved so dearly into a whole new realm. The studio is probably most famous for their animated adaptation of Sendak's *Where the Wild*

*Things Are*, which serves

as a clear example of Schindel's dedication to quality. Though

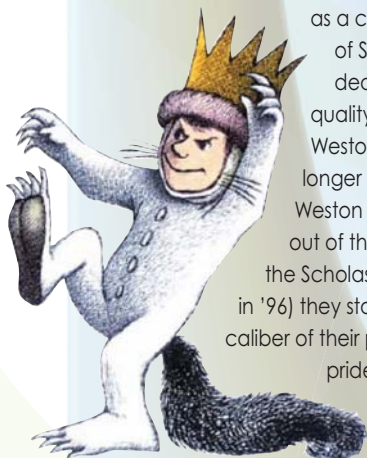
Weston Woods is no longer in the woods of Weston (they moved out of the cabin after the Scholastic purchase in '96) they stand firm on the

caliber of their productions and pride themselves

on being the place "where books come alive!" They are

currently working on a "mini-feature" based on Rosemary Wells's *A Trip to Bunny Planet* trilogy (with Czech animation house Kratzky and director Gene Deitch) and a sequel to their adaptation of Mo Willems' *Knuffle Bunny*, to be titled *Knuffle Bunny Too: A Case of Mistaken Identity* and directed by Hanna-Barbera veteran Karen Villareal. We hope that the good folk of Weston Woods, now in the able hands of VP Linda Lee, will continue creating fresh and accessible animated takes on the world of children's lit for another 55 years—at least!

**Website:** <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/westonwoods>



## 50 Years:

### Little Blue Guys (and Gal) Hit the Half-Century Mark!

**H**endrik Coysman, CEO of International Merchandising Promotion and Services (IMPS), wrote to remind us that the industrious blue clan known as **The Smurfs** are celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. The brainchild of Belgian cartoonist Peyo, the Smurfs (or Les Schtroumpfs as they're known in the French-speaking world) made their first appearance in the comics magazine *Le Journal de Spirou* on October 23, 1958. The rest of the world really got to know them thanks to the hugely successful Hanna-Barbera series which aired 1981-1989 on NBC. Nominated several times for Daytime Emmys, the show won the Emmy for Outstanding Children's Entertainment Series in 1983. Paramount/Nickelodeon is planning a big CG-animated feature for release later in 2008, and we were thrilled to hear that John Lithgow and Julia Sweeney may be attached to the project. Paul Neesan and Julia Pistor are exec producing the movie, which the last we heard, had a script by Herb Ratner (*Mr. Lucky*). Warner Bros. will also release a box set of the series in conjunction with the 50th anniversary. It sounds like it's going to be a super-smurfy kind of a year. We're hoping the movie will answer the burning question: how does Smurfette manage to keep up with all those randy little guys in her village?

**Website:** [www.smurf.com](http://www.smurf.com)



### Building a Brick Empire

**I**t's hard to believe that children around the world have been growing up with **LEGO** bricks for half a century now, but it's even harder to imagine a childhood without these ingenious little building blocks. When Ole Kirk Christiansen first began carving his interlocking bricks out of wood in his workshop in Billund, Denmark, little did he know that the company he named LEGO (a combination of the Danish words *leg* godt, meaning "play well") would become a global toy sensation. Now known as LEGO Systems, Inc., and headed by president for the Americas Soren Torp Laursen and CEO Jorgen Vig Knudstrop, the company has managed to strike a perfect balance between expanding possibilities and sticking with what works. In fact, the cellulose acetate (that's plastic, mind you) bricks that Christiansen developed 50 years ago are still compatible with their modern counterparts. These brilliant blocks have passed more than one impressive milestone; enough LEGO bricks have been sold in the last 50 years to give 75 to every person on Earth (we wonder if this figure includes the one essential brick that inevitably gets lost under the sofa?). Another interesting figure that Laursen and Knudstrop shared with us: Six eight-stud LEGO bricks can be combined 102,981,500 different ways.

Bricks aren't the only thing that LEGO churns out. 2008 also marks the 30th anniversary of the **LEGO Minifigure**. The figures, or "Minifigs" to enthusiasts, have evolved plenty in the last three decades and have proved to be just as popular as their rectangular predecessors. In 2006, the number of Minifigs produced exceeded the population of the planet; that's a lot of interchangeable heads. Animated Minifigs have also been used to pay homage to another cultural classic in the *LEGO Star Wars* video games. And that's not even the end of it, as the Danish master toy-smiths also get to celebrate the 10 year anniversary of LEGO **Mindstorms**. These nifty robotics kits are definitely part of the new wave of demi-DIY toys, but only time will tell if Mindstorms will achieve the admirable longevity and universal appeal of the original LEGO bricks. Regardless, to the pioneering creators of these true toy originals, we can only say "Tillykke!"

**Website:** [www.lego.com](http://www.lego.com)





## 40 Years:

### Keeping Up a Classic Brand

Though John Rocknowski founded **Speed Racer Enterprises** in 1991, the company's namesake brand has been a cultural icon for much, much longer. Based on the manga by Tatsuo Yoshida, the original Japanese series was known as *Mach Go Go Go*—a fact which may help fans figure out just what the heck the "G" on Speed's shirt stands for (a common question, according to Rocknowski). Produced by Japan's Tatsunoko Prod., the popular show was quickly picked up by American syndicator Trans-Lux and became a smash sensation. The success of *Speed Racer* is the best pre-Pokémon example of anime's appeal in the U.S. and the show has experienced a few reincarnations in the last several decades due to its persisting popularity. Toon fans will be glad to hear that a brand-new television series, *Speed Racer: The Next Generation*, is set to premiere this year on May 4 on Nicktoons. *Next Generation* will follow the adventures of the original Speed Racer's children and will be animated by the Flash gurus at Animation Collective (Kappa Mikey, *Ellen's Acres*). The show's arrival will coincide with the release of a live-action *Speed Racer* feature by the Wachowski brothers. Be sure to keep an eye on Rocknowski and SRE as they continue to keep this classic series up and running on all four wheels, at mach speed all the way!

Website: [www.speedracer.com](http://www.speedracer.com)



## 25 Years:

### Indie Game Pioneers

For those of us who have kept a close eye on the independent animation scene, Don Bluth and his hugely influential company **Bluth Group** will always be something of a pioneering icon. A former Disney talent who began his career as an assistant animator on *Sleeping Beauty* and went on to work on *Robin Hood*, *The Rescuers* and *Pete's Dragon*, he formed the Bluth Group with Gary Goldman and John Pomeroy after making a splash with the short *Banjo the Woodpile Cat* and his first feature *The Secret of N.I.M.H.* (1982). The Bluth Group's most famous project is the *Dragon's Lair* video game, which like the company, celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

So, what is the one thing nobody can guess about the company? Bluth says, "We're not gamers. Not one of us plays video games! The game was a hit, but it didn't make us or the company rich!"

Sure, they didn't get rich, but at least they are continuing to provide their fans with more entertaining titles. The studio's second hit video game *Space Ace* will be coming out in High Def Blu-ray format and *Dragon's Lair* will be available on Nintendo DS in early 2008. When asked about the reason they stay in the business, they tell us, "Good question! Hopefully to not let traditional animation die!" And that indeed is a game objective we can all get behind.

Website: [www.donbluth.com](http://www.donbluth.com)



### Bringing Anime to the West

Robot fans should send a big birthday card to St. Louis, Missouri-based animation and distribution company **World Events Productions**. Founded by Edward Koplar, the company brought Toei Animation and Bandai's *GoLion* and *Dairugger XV* to American audiences and introduced ***Voltron: Defender of the Universe*** to toon fans in the 1980s. *Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs*, *Denver, the Last Dinosaur* and *Vytor the Starfire Companion* are some of the company's other hits through its 25 years of operation. The company's Jeremy Corray tell us that their in-house slogan is "Form blazing deals!" and that



their role model is—guess what!—Pixar! He says the reason they stay in business is because their fans never give up. How about this little piece of trivia: World Events Productions started out in the business as a news magazine covering international events, and they gave sports personality Bob Costas his first big break! Of course, the big news broke last summer that 20th Century Fox and Mark Gordon Productions are developing a live-action movie based on *Voltron*. It's a good time to be in the mecha robot business.

Website: [www.wep.com](http://www.wep.com)

### What? More Henson Anniversaries?



Somehow the folks at **The Henson Company** manage to appear in our annual anniversary issue every year. Their fine excuse this year? It turns out that the company's beloved ***Fraggle Rock*** series premiered on HBO on January 10 in 1983—let's see, that makes the show 25 years old! Not only did the show serve as a great allegory of the human world, it also offered catchy songs by Philip Balsam and Dennis Lee. Company spokeswoman Nicole Goldman wrote to also remind us that the Henson headquarters is located in the original Hollywood studio opened by Charlie Chaplin in 1918. That means it's Chaplin Studio's 90th anniversary. Woo hoo! "Our mission is to make the world a better place by inspiring people to celebrate life," she adds. "Without a doubt, we are still inspired by our founder Jim Henson." Beautifully put, Nicole! Just for that, we are happy to include you in this anniversary issue, once again!

Website: [www.henson.com](http://www.henson.com)



## 20 Years:

### Monstrous Acts!

If you've been involved in the horror and vfx field over the past two decades, the name Scott Essman may be familiar to you. He's the CEO and founder of **Visionary Cinema**, who put together the docu *Jack Pierce: The Man Behind the Monsters*. He has produced and written projects about *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Planet of the Apes*, make-up artist Dick Smith and many other vfx fan favorites. Next up for Essman is a new series featuring animated versions of the classic monster characters when they were very young, titled *Monster Babies!* Congrats, Scott. Here's to many more thrilling, blood-curdling adventures in the next two decades.

Website: [www.visionarycinema.com](http://www.visionarycinema.com)



### From Britain With Flair



It's tough enough to survive as a producer of top-rated animated shows in the U.K. for two years. That's why it's something of a miracle that good old **Collingwood O'Hare Entertainment** has been able to navigate these tumultuous toon waters for two decades now. Founded by writer/director Tony Collingwood and producer Chris O'Hare, the innovative toon studio has produced an impressive number of charming children's TV shows, including *Gordon the Garden Gnome*, *Harry and His Bucket Full of Dinosaurs*, *Oscar's Orchestra*, *Rarg* and *Dennis the Menace*. In the past few years, the shop has really pushed the envelope with two beautifully designed and witty offerings—*Yoko! Jakamoko! Toto* and *The Secret Show*, both of which have nabbed too many awards to mention. Collingwood tells us that British comic and author Spike Milligan is something of a role model at his company. What's one thing that nobody knows about the studio? "We're

still solvent!" he quips. And the silliest thing they ever did? "We put up five clocks showing the time zones around the world. But they were cuckoo clocks and drove the staff mad by lunch time!"

Fans can expect two hot shows in the pipeline: one is *The Parpazoids*, a CG-animated series about wind-based life forms, and *Ding! Dong! Ping! Pong!*, clearly one of those lovable and amusing preschool shows only the Brits know how to make. Of course, we had to ask Collingwood why they're still in the toon business. He replies, "Because it's enormous fun, and we don't have a Plan B!"

Website: [www.collingwoodohare.com](http://www.collingwoodohare.com)

## 15 Years:

### Scene-Stealers of Seville

The beautiful city of Seville has played an enormous role in the rich culture and history of Spain throughout the centuries. According to legend, the Andalusian town was built by none other than Hercules. For the past 15 years, though, the metropolitan city has been a hotbed of cool animation projects created by the folks at **Forma Animada**. Founded by Enrique F. Medina, the company offers a wide array of animation and audio-visual services. In recent years, Forma Animada has been producing various original series, such as *Abby Careful* and is now busy with a feature-length project titled *Mocland*. Not surprisingly, the company's spokeswoman María Jiménez Pumares says Pixar is the studio's biggest role model. "We stay in the business because we are young and crazy," she adds. And the company slogan is "We can do it!" After taking a look at the studio's impressive portfolio, we have no reason to doubt them!

Website: [www.forma-animada.com](http://www.forma-animada.com)



### Royal Treats

It comes as a shock to think that with all fantastic animated series, features and shorts that have been produced by U.K.-based **Illuminated Film Company**, the shop is only 15 years old. Founded by current president and CEO, the talented Iain Harvey, the studio's first big project was *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, which was based on the famous book by Eric Carle. Then came Piet Kroon's award-winning short, *T.R.A.N.S.I.T.*, which blew everything else out of the water in 1997, followed by Jimmy Murakami's *Christmas Carol: The Movie* in 2001. Harvey, who was the exec producer of such classics as *When the Wind Blows*, *Father Christmas* and *The Snowman* is now overseeing the worldwide hit series *Little Princess*.

The studio's Vicky Godding wrote to tell us the little-known fact that many of the Illuminated folks play frogs, rabbits, ducks and mice in *Little Princess*. "Listen out," she says, "we think we steal the show!" Upcoming projects include a fun new show about a cat and dog's love/hate affair titled *Buddy & Elvis*. Of course when we ask Godding to give us the reason they stay in this unpredictable business, she says, "Because we've got nothing better to do and working on children's programs ensures that we don't have to grow up yet!" Hmmm, she sounds just like a little princess we all know!

Website: [www.illuminatedfilms.com](http://www.illuminatedfilms.com)





## 10 Years:

### Three Crime-Fighting Girls Reveal All!

**C**reator **Craig McCracken** was kind enough to channel his famous animated heroines **The Powerpuff Girls** for the purposes of this feature!

#### What's the name of your company?

**Blossom:** Um, we're not really a company, but I guess we would be The Powerpuff Girls!

**Buttercup:** Not POWDER!

**Bubbles:** No "D," no DUH!

#### Which anniversary are you celebrating in 2008?

**Blossom:** It was 1998 that we first started!

**Buttercup:** Kicking butt!

**Bubbles:** And saving the world before bedtime!

**Blossom:** We're celebrating 10 years of crimefighting.

**Buttercup:** PPGX I like to call it

**Bubbles:** I feel old.

#### Who was your company founder?

**Blossom:** Our father!

**Buttercup:** Professor Utonium.

**Bubbles:** Why do I wanna say Craig?

#### What is your company's most famous product/character/project?

**Blossom:** ME!

**Buttercup:** ME!!

**Bubbles:** ME!!!

#### Tell us something that nobody can guess about you?

**Bubbles:** We're sisters! You would never know by lookin' at us!

#### What was the best thing you ever did?

**Blossom:** Stop an evil monkey from taking over the world!

#### What was the silliest thing you ever did?

**Buttercup:** Stop an evil monkey from taking over the world.

#### Do you have any cool upcoming projects?

**Blossom:** To keep saving the world!

**Buttercup:** We've been doing a lot of that in Japan lately.

**Bubbles:** But lookin' forward to coming back home and saving the world here.

#### Why do you stay in business?

**Blossom:** Because the world is an evil and dangerous place.

**Buttercup:** 'Cause havin' superpowers and fightin' bad guys rocks!

**Bubbles:** 'Cause you can't trust a monkey.

#### What is your in-house slogan?

**Blossom:** We fight crime.

**Buttercup:** That's what we do.

**Bubbles:** Duh!

#### Who is your biggest role model/idol?

**Blossom:** Any person who does good to help the planet and their fellow man.

**Buttercup:** That guy in the action movie who stopped those other guys—he's awesome!

**Bubbles:** My sisters!



### Great Word of Mouth

**P**ortland, Oregon-based public relations house **Liaison P.R.** will celebrate its tenth year in '08. Founded by Heidi Lowell, this awesome boutique outfit has a wide selection of high-profile clients in the vfx and animation world. "We're very proud of the work we are currently doing for NVIDIA and Luxology," says Lowell. "One of our most rewarding accomplishments was elevating our first client, Kaydara, from a small plug-in company all the way to becoming a key player in the animation industry which lead to the acquisition by Alias/Autodesk."

One of Liaison's most high-profile jobs was placing its client D-BOX's motion-enabled chair on *Good Morning America* for CES 2007.

Lowell says she owes the name of the company to her husband. "I was going to call it Purple!" She also adds, "We are in this business because of the people, hands down. The press and clients we work with in this industry are brilliant [Gee, thanks!]. They are unique, creative, bright, innovative and—for the most part—without ego. We also have an amazing team of people in house. We are like a family." And who is Heidi's biggest role model? "Mrs. Incredible, a.k.a. Elastigirl. She rocks!" What a class act—we can't recommend Liaison enough.

**Website:** [www.liaisonpr.com](http://www.liaisonpr.com)





### In Praise of Spanish Brainiacs

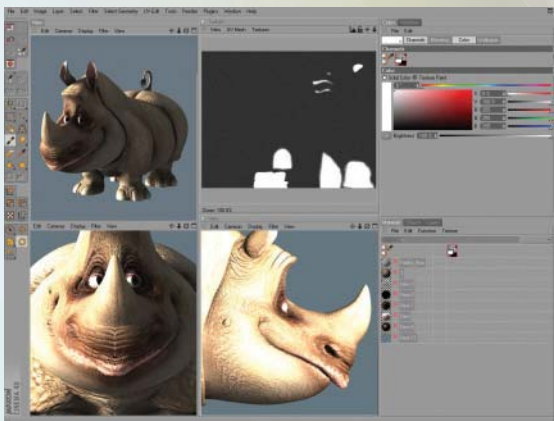
**V**ictor Gonzalez and Ignacio Vargas, the founders of **Next Limit Technologies**, tell us that their biggest role models are the guys of Google. The Madrid-based tech solutions outfit is also celebrating its tenth year in the business. "We didn't know that it was impossible to make, so we just went ahead and did it!" they admit modestly. Well, if you had created the RealFlow solutions and were working on Xflow, an accurate fluid simulation tool for engineering and scientific purposes, you'd be just as cocky!

"Our developers are insanely clever square-heads that continue to work at home and hardly ever sleep," says company spokesperson Nicole van der Burg. We're sure she will let us know the minute they break the time-space continuum.

**Website:** [www.nextlimits.com](http://www.nextlimits.com)



### Prize-Winning Packages



**V**fx artists all over the world are quite familiar with German tech powerhouse **Maxon Computers** thanks to the company's powerful tools Cinema 4D and BodyPaint 3D. But the artist-friendly operation has been doing a lot more during its 10 years of operation. Founded by CEO Paul Babb in 1998, Maxon developed Cineversity, an online training and education site which began with 100 video tutorials only 16 months ago, and now has nearly 900 tutorials with over 100 hours of content. "A few years ago, we had an event at NAB called Product Bash," the company's U.S. spokeswoman Diana Lee tells us. "At the event we hung software product boxes filled with prizes from the ceiling, like piñatas. We offered attendees a chance to explain to the crowd why they were about to target a particular prize, then we cheered them on as they smashed the box with a plastic bat until a prize emerged. It was a

lot of fun, but definitely silly." Now that's the kind of enterprising innovation we expect from the folks behind BodyPaint 3D.

**Website:** [www.maxon.net](http://www.maxon.net)

### SpongeBob's Favorite Hangout

**I**n March 1998, **Nickelodeon Animation Studios** opened the doors of its colorful studio in Burbank, Calif. (Mind you, that's also the same year Fred Seibert launched his highly influential anthology series *Oh Yeah! Cartoons* on Nick!) Under the direction of senior VP and general manager Mark Taylor, the studio has certainly hit a lot of high notes in recent years. If you watched any of Nick's round-the-clock Nicktoons marathon programming this past Thanksgiving, you've certainly seen many of the toons the studio has produced over the past 10 years. According to the studio's awesome spokeswoman Nicole Parker, Nick's in-house slogan is "Having fun: If it's worth doing, it's worth overdoing!"



In 2008, viewers can look forward to the latest project from the Nicktoons hit machine, titled *The Mighty B!*, co-created by *Saturday Night Live*'s Amy Poehler, *Fairly OddParents* staff writer Cynthia True and Emmy-nominated *SpongeBob SquarePants* storyboard artist Erik Wiese. Nicole says their biggest role model is—guess!—SpongeBob, "Because he's the ultimate optimist!" She also tells us that most people don't know that Nick has its own basketball court, ping-pong tables and outdoor tree-lined courtyard! Hey, Pixar, what do you think of that—huh?!

**Website:** [www.nick.com](http://www.nick.com)





## Kelli's Adventures in Clay

Some people get in to this business for all the right reasons. **Bix Pix Entertainment** president and founder **Kelli Bixler** is certainly one of them. Described by many (including all of us at *AniMag*) as one of the nicest people in the business, Bixler says she got into animation because she loves the animators, the artists and their work. Ten years ago, Bixler got her first animation assignment from the Disney Channel, a clay-animated interstitial series called *Dinner Time* which centered on a lonely girl who got to eat with famous historical characters. Then came two successful stand-alone clay animated projects, *Miss Twiggley's Tree* and *Doh Doh Island*. Last holiday season, Bix Pix hit it out of the ball park with the clever TV special, *Holidaze: The Christmas That Almost Didn't Happen* and *It's Christmas time for the Jews*, a hilarious musical short that aired on *Saturday Night Live* (2005).



When asked about the craziest things they ever did at the studio, Bixler responds, "We got a call to do two minutes of stop-motion animation in 11 days—from set building, molding, sculpting, painting, sewing, animating and posting—and we delivered two minutes and ten seconds on time...and nobody died!"

Bix Pix has several new stop-motion projects in the works in 2008: *The Roadents*, *Miro* and a cool 26-episode TV show titled *Earth's Extraterrestrial Kids (E.E.K.)*. Bixler, who cites the artists at Pixar and her father as two of her all-time role models, is one of the reasons we love to cover animation. We



wish her an awesome 10th anniversary year and hope we're all around to celebrate the 50th in 2048!

Website: [www.bixpix.com](http://www.bixpix.com)

## Five Years:

### Reinventing an Icon

The team at newly christened **Imira Entertainment** can all raise a cool glass of sangria this March to toast the five-year anniversary of their previous incarnation, **Icon Animation**. Founded in Barcelona in 2003 by animation producer Myriam Ballesteros and industry vet Sergi Reigt, Icon quickly gained notoriety within the industry as an important third party distributor, not only for Spain but Portugal, Latin America and Italy as well. Plenty of big league cartoon players have relied on Icon to place their properties in these sectors and even to expand them into the merchandising, publishing and mobile and on-line content markets. Not bad for a company whose employees all claim to be secretly 12 years old! Although, with their knack for placing children's programming, maybe we should believe them. Imira has certainly come a long way from the days when, we hear, Ballesteros and Reigt strutted into their first MIPCOM market with a full agenda—and nothing to sell. Now with hit cross-media property *Lola & Virginia* under their belts and the magic-infused animated action comedy *Sandra the Fairytale Detective* next up on the roster, the crack duo behind Imira are sure to make a name for themselves...again!



Website: [www.imiraentertainment.com](http://www.imiraentertainment.com)

### Paperless Power

The *Triplets of Belleville*, *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*, *Curious George* and *The Simpsons Movie* are only a few of the top-notch animated movies that have used **Toon Boom's** Emmy-winning animation software solutions in the past few years. The influential company, which was established in 1994, will celebrate the fifth anniversary of its **Harmony** package this year. Like its sister product *Opus*, the software is based on a centralized database system, but it also has additional tools that can be used to create cut-out style animation. These tools include the transform tool, morphing, inverse kinematics and the "glue" effect. Under the direction of company president and CEO Joan Vogelesang, Toon Boom recently announced the release of various consumer products that cater to creative minds of all ages. It's important to note that Toon Boom's role goes beyond technology and includes consultancy services tailored to customer's needs. With recent expansions in Indian, Asian and African regions, the company is poised to set some awe-inspiring records in the year ahead.

Website: [www.toonboom.com](http://www.toonboom.com) ■

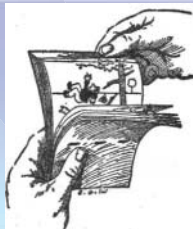


—Mercedes Milligan & Ramin Zahed



# Toon Town Flashbacks: The 2008 Edition

**140 Years Ago:** John Barnes Linnet patents the first **flip book** in England.



**125 Years Ago:** Max Fleischer is born in Vienna on July 19, 1883.



**100 Years Ago:** Tex Avery, George Pal and Mel Blanc are three of the toon luminaries born in 1908. Émile Cohl presents **Fantasmogorie**, the first filmed animation of drawings on paper, in France.

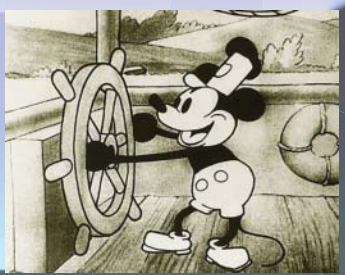


**95 Years Ago:** Bob Clampett is born in San Diego, Calif. on May 8, 1913.

Walter R. Booth and Edgar Rogers combine live action with toy animation in **Santa Claus**.



**80 Years Ago:** Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks introduce what becomes an enduring global icon with the short, **Steamboat Willie**, Mickey Mouse's first official appearance (silent version on July 29; sound version on Nov. 18, 1928).



**75 Years Ago:** David Fleischer introduces the world to a certain spinach-chomping strongman in **Popeye the Sailor**.

Willis O'Brien frightens moviegoers with his killer vfx in Merian C. Cooper's **King Kong**.



Burt Gillett directs the Oscar-winning Disney short, **Three Little Pigs**.

Ub Iwerks delivers the ComiColor Cartoon **Jack and the Beanstalk** on Nov. 30.



**70 Years Ago:** Bugs Bunny makes his first appearance (unnamed) in **Porky's Hare Hunt**.

Jean Painlevé and René Bertrand's **Barbe-Bleue** (Bluebeard) raises the bar in clay animation.

Dick Rickard's adaptation of the children's book **Ferdinand the Bull** is released. The short wins an Oscar in 1939.



**65 Years Ago:** The Fred Quimby-directed **Tom and Jerry** toon, **The Yankee Doodle Mouse** is released in June. It wins the Oscar for Best Animated Short the following year.

Norman McLaren creates National Film Board of Canada's animation division. Among the noteworthy shorts released in 1943 are **Jack-Wabbit and the Beanstalk**, **Victory Through Air Power**, **El Gaucho Goofy**, **Private Pluto**, **Saludos Amigos** and **Red Hot Riding Hood**.



**60 Years Ago:** Jay Ward and Alexander Anderson form **Television Arts Productions** in Hollywood. Among the year's top animated shorts are the Oscar-winning **The Little Orphan** (directed by Fred Quimby) and the Oscar-nominated **Mickey and the Seal** (Charles A. Nichols).

Disney releases **Melody Time** featuring *Once Upon a Wintertime*, *Bumble Boogie*, *Johnny Appleseed*, *Little Toot*, *Trees*, *Blame It on the Samba* and *Pecos Bill*.

**Hector the Bulldog** makes his first appearance in the **Friz Freleng**-directed Tweety & Sylvester short, **I Taw a Putty Cat**.

**Marvin the Martian** first appears in **Haredevil Hare** on July 24, 1948.







**55 Years Ago:** Disney releases *Peter Pan* on February 5, directed by **Hamilton Luske**, **Clyde Geronimi** and **Wilfred Jackson**.

Shorts highlights include *Duck Amuck*, *Duck Dodgers in the 24 1/2th Century*, *Jerry and Jumbo*, *Magoo Slept Here*.

**Speedy Gonzalez** debuts in Robert McKimson's *Cat-Tails for Two*.

**Bill Hurtz's** *The Unicorn in the Garden*

becomes UPA's first Cartoon Special.

**Art Clokey** introduces the world to his delightful green hero, **Gumby**, in *Gumbasis*.

Legendary Disney animators **Ward Kimball** and **Charles A. Nichols** offer a crash course in the history of musical instruments in the Oscar-winning short *Toot, Whistle, Plunk and Boom*.



**50 Years Ago:** **Friz Freleng** directs the Oscar-winning short *Knighty Knight Bugs*, in which Bugs Bunny appears as a court jester who dukes it out with the Black Knight (Yosemite Sam).

**Les Clark** directs the Disney short, *Paul Bunyan*.

Hanna-Barbera's popular *The Huckleberry Hound Show*

debuts in syndication.

It's a good year for Sidney as Terrytoons and Arthur Bartsch deliver *Sick, Sick Sidney* in June and *Sidney's Family Tree* in December.



**45 Years Ago:** Penned by **Mel Brooks** and directed by **Ernest Pintoff**, the Oscar-winning short, *The Critic*, centers on an old man who is trying to understand abstract animation.

**Warner Bros.** closes its cartoon studio in May 1963.

*King Features Trilogy* debuts on TV, containing animated episodes of *Beetle Bailey*, *Krazy Kat*, and *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith*.

*Tennessee Tuxedo and His Tales* (TOTAL TV/Leonardo Prods.) premieres on CBS.

Animated version of **Osamu Tezuka's** *Astro Boy* debuts in Japan.

**Friz Freleng** and **David DePatie** form the **DePatie-Freleng Enterprises** studio.

Young Arthur learns about his legacy from Merlin in Disney's animated version of the T.H. White epic *The Sword in Stone*, released in theaters in December.



## 40 Years Ago:

London's **TVC** finishes animating The Beatles' movie *Yellow Submarine*, directed by **George Dunning**.

**Wolfgang Reitherman**

and his

team at Disney bring A.A. Milne's beloved bear to animated life in the

Oscar-winning short *Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day*.

**Faith and John Hubley** finish

their Oscar-nominated short

*Windy Day*.

Among the animated TV series debuting in September are Filmation's *The Archie Show* and Hanna-Barbera's *The Banana Splits Adventure Hour*, *The New Adventures of Huck Finn* and *The Wacky Races*.

Directed by **Jimmy Murakami**, the Oscar-nominated *The Magic Pear Tree* is released.



**35 Years Ago:** Directed by **Charles Nichols** and **Iwao Takamoto**, Hanna-Barbera's *Charlotte's Web* offers a musical version of the E. B. White classic, featuring the voices of **Debbie Reynolds** and **Paul Lynde**.

Featuring puppets designed by **Ivor**

**Wood**, FilmFair's *The Wombles* series debuts in the U.K.

**Ralph Bakshi's** *Heavy Traffic* opens in theaters in August.

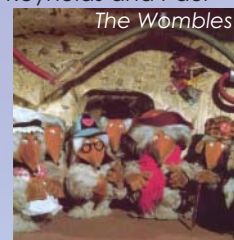
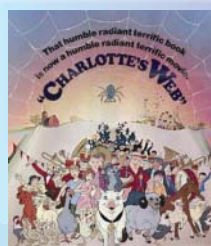
In September, viewers are treated to a wild selection of animated series, including Hanna-Barbera's *Jeannie*, *Speed Buggy*, *Superfriends* and *Yogi's Gang* and

Filmation's *Lassie's Rescue Rangers*, *Mission: Magic!*, *My Favorite Martians* and *Star Trek!*

**Caroline** and **Frank Mouris** deliver their Oscar-winning short *Frank Film*.

On Nov. 8, Disney releases *Robin Hood*, directed by **Wolfgang**

**Reitherman**, which features the Oscar-nominated song "Love" and some 100,000 painted cels and 800 painted backgrounds.





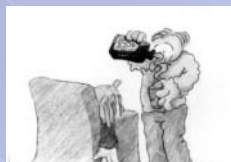
**30 Years Ago:** *Watership Down*, Richard Adam's popular novel about a rabbit clan,



becomes an underrated animated feature, directed by **Martin Rosen** and **Tony Guy**.

The National Film Board of Canada continues its

affair with the Animated Short Oscar with *Special Delivery*, directed by **Eunice Macaulay** and **John Weldon**. **Charles Swenson** and **Fred Wolf** present *The Mouse and His Child*.



*Special Delivery*



*Fantastic Four*

New shows debuting on TV in the fall are *The All-New Popeye Hour*, *Baggy Pants and The Nitwits*, *Challenge of the Superfriends*, *The Fantastic Four*, *Godzilla Power Hour*, *The New Superfriends* and *Fang Face*.

*Rip Van Winkle*, **Wil Vinton's** stop-motion version of the famous

Washington Irving tale, hits theaters and lands an Oscar nom the following year.

**Ralph Bakshi's** adaptation of *Lord of the Rings* comes to theaters stateside in November.



*Lord of the Rings*



*Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*

**25 Years Ago:** Vfx masters **Richard Edlund**, **Dennis Muren**, **Ken Ralston** and **Phil Tippett** work their magic once again in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*.

**Cosgrove-Hall's** award-winning special *The Wind in the Willows* debuts in the U.K.

**La Lanterna Magica** studio is founded in Italy.

**John M. Mills** and **Elphin Lloyd-Jones** found **Telemagination Studio** in the U.K.

Indie animator **John Canemaker** delivers *Bottom's Dream*.

**Don Bluth** offers the trendsetting videogame *Dragon's Lair* in June.

**Jim Henson's** *Fraggle Rock* debuts on HBO.

There's an abundance of new (and very questionable) animated shows on TV this fall. The list includes *Alvin and The Chipmunks*, *The Biskits*, *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*, *The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show*, *Dungeons and Dragons*, *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*, *The Littles*, *Mr. T* and *The Pac-Man/Rubik the Amazing Cube Hour*.

**Jimmy Picker's** clay-mated *Sundae in New York* provides a whimsical take on the Big Apple and wins the Oscar in 1984.



*Mickey's Christmas Carol*

Directed by **Burney Mattinson**, *Mickey's Christmas Carol* puts a Disney spin on the Dickens classic. **Don Bluth**, **Gary Goldman** and **John Pomeroy** form **The Bluth Group**.



*The Wind in the Willows*

**20 Years Ago:** 1988 emerges as a huge year for anime: **Isao Takahata's** widely influential feature *Grave of the Fireflies*, **Hayao Miyazaki's** charming *My Neighbor Totoro* and **Katsuhiro Ôtomo's** dark, futuristic epic *Akira* open to popular and critical acclaim.

Meanwhile, the TV scene in the U.S. is a completely different story. Among this year's debuts are *Alf Tales*, *Beany and Cecil*, *Garfield and Friends*, *Gumby Adventures*, *The New Yogi Bear Show*, *A Pup Named Scooby-Doo*, *The New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*, *Superman*, *Transformers* and *Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters!*

**Robert Zemeckis** mixes live action and animation brilliantly with *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, which wins over audiences and nabs four Oscars, including one for animation director **Richard Williams**, in 1989.



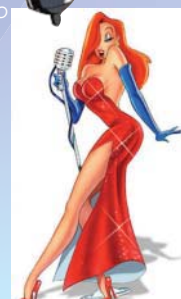
*Oliver & Company*

**John Lasseter's** Oscar-winning, CG-animated short *Tin Toy* gives the world a glimpse of Pixar's fantastic future.

**Billy Joel**, **Bette Midler**, **Joey Lawrence** and **Dom DeLuise** round up the voice cast in Disney's *Oliver & Company*. **Richard Scribner's** musical, canine take on the *Oliver Twist* story.



*My Neighbor Totoro*



*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*





The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends

**15 Years Ago:** Sweet and pastoral are how you can describe the two new British series of the year: **Telemagination's** *The Animals of Farthing Wood* and **TVC's** *The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends*.

**Nick Park** and **Aardman Animations** offer the brilliant plasticine-animated *Wallace & Gromit in The Wrong Trousers* (which wins an Oscar in 1994).

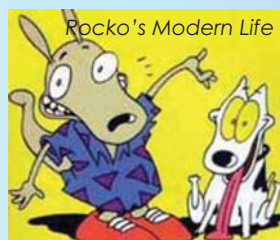
Warner Bros. releases the stylish *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*, directed by **Eric Radomski** and **Bruce W. Timm**.



Wallace &amp; Gromit

Directed by **Phil Roman**, *Tom and Jerry: The Movie* opens in theaters.

The TV animation landscape continues to deliver popular and noteworthy titles. Among the many debuting this year: *Rocko's Modern Life*, *PB&J Otter*, *The World of Eric Carle*, *The Pink Panther*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Family Dog*, *Droopy: Master Defective*, *The Adventures of Blinky Bill*, *Animaniacs*, *Biker Mice from Mars* and *Madeline*.



Rocko's Modern Life

**David Fine** and **Alison Snowden** hit the jackpot with their witty 2D short, *Bob's Birthday*, which wins the Oscar in 1995.

**Steve Oakes**, **Susan Holden-Squibb**, **Richard Winkler** and **David Starr** form **Curious Pictures** in New York City.



Bob's Birthday

**Tim Burton** hits another high point in his career with the stop-motion animated musical movie *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.

**Mike Judge's** crude duo, *Beavis and Butt-head*, debuts on MTV on March 8.



CatDog

**10 Years Ago:** MTV spoofs stars and their inflated egos with the new claymated series, *Celebrity Deathmatch*.

**Nelvana** animates *Bob and Margaret*, a series spinoff of **Snowden/Fine's** *Bob's Birthday* short.

**Nicktoons Studio** opens in Burbank in March.

**Peter Hannan** gives us his hybrid creation, *CatDog*, which debuts in April on Nickelodeon.

Warner Bros. releases **Frederick Du Chau's** *Quest for Camelot* in May.

**Tony Bancroft** and **Barry Cook's** lush feature *Mulan* gives audiences a feisty new Disney heroine to love in June.

**Fred Seibert** forms **Frederator Studios** and serves up his cool anthology series *Oh Yeah! Cartoons* on Nickelodeon in July.

In Japan, film audiences flock to see *Pokémon: The First Movie*.

DreamWorks releases *Antz*, the first 3D-animated insect feature of the year, as well as the 2D Biblical tale *The Prince of Egypt*, which wins an Oscar for the original **Stephen Schwartz/Hans Zimmer** song "When You Believe."

Directed by **Michel Ocelot**, the beautifully animated *Kirikou et la Sorcière* (*Kirikou and the Sorceress*) wins over French audiences.

TV animation watchers have a hard time catching up with all the new toons debuting

this year. *Godzilla: The Series*, *Disney's Hercules*, *Histeria!*, *Initial D*, *Invasion America*, *Cowboy Bebop*, *Pinky, Elmyra & The Brain*, *Silver Surfer*, *Stressed Eric*, *Toonsylvania* and *The Wild Thornberrys*.

Created by **William Joyce**, Nelvana's Emmy-winning series, *Rolie Polie Olie*, pushes the CG envelope.

**Craig McCracken's** *The Powerpuff Girls* begin their fight against evil forces of the universe on Cartoon Network in November.

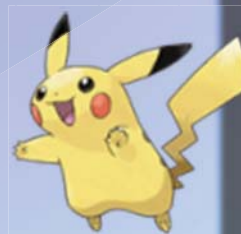


A Bug's Life

**John Lasseter** and **Andrew Stanton's** *A Bug's Life* reminds audiences why nobody does it better than Pixar.

Among the other feature newsmakers of the year are *Perfect Blue*, *The Rugrats Movie*, *Lupin III: Tokyo Crisis*, *The Batman/Superman Movie* and *Galaxy Express 999: Eternal Fantasy*.

**Don Hertzfeldt's** *Billy's Balloons*, **Sylvain Chomet's** *Old Lady and the Pigeons* and **Chris Wedge's** Oscar-winning *Bunny* are three of the year's favorite shorts.



Pokémon: The First Movie



**5 Years Ago:** Anime has a strong year on the small screen as **Bobobo-bo Bo-bobo**, **Ninja Scroll: The Series**, **Wolf's Rain** and **Fullmetal Alchemist** make their debut.

Adult animation has its share of hits and misses as **Gary the Rat**, **Stripperella** and **Ren & Stimpy's Adult Party Cartoon** premiere on Spike TV.

Cartoon Network unveils **Star Wars: Clone Wars** (directed by Genndy Tartakovsky) and **The Venture Bros.** (created by Jackson Publick and Doc Hammer).



Star Wars: Clone Wars

Teen Titans



Mike Young Productions delivers **Jakers! The Adventures of Piggley Winks** on PBS.

Klasky Csupo and Nickelodeon age the Rugrats kids in **All Grown Up**.

Other new TV shows entertaining young viewers in 2003 are **Astro Boy**, **Clifford's Puppy Days**, **Code Lyoko**, **Corneil and Bernie**, **Kenny the Shark**, **Little Robots**, **Shaman King**, **Sonic X**, **Tutenstein**, **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**, **Stuart Little**, **The Save-Ums!**, **Silverwing**, **Yakkity Yak** and **Yoko!**

Paris-based **Marathon**

Animation follows up **Totally Spies** with **Martin Mystery**.

Warner Bros. Animation delivers **Duck Dodgers**, **Teen Titans** and **Xiaolin Showdown** while Disney TV Animation offers **Lilo & Stitch: The Series**.

Aardman's **Creature Comforts** becomes a TV series in the U.K.

Directed by **Andrew Stanton** and **Lee Unkrich**,



Finding Nemo

Pixar's funny and poignant **Finding Nemo** becomes one of the most popular animated movies of all time and wins the Oscar for Best Animated Feature the following year.

DreamWorks releases **Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas** in theaters and opens **Shrek 4-D** in special park venues. The studio's specialty label also brings **Satoshi Kon's Millennium Actress** to the U.S.

Frederator Studios offers **Rob Renzetti's My Life as a Teenage Robot** on Nickelodeon.



The Triplets of Belleville

Stripperella



**Mike Judge** and **Don Hertzfeldt** launch their shorts showcase **The Animation Show**.

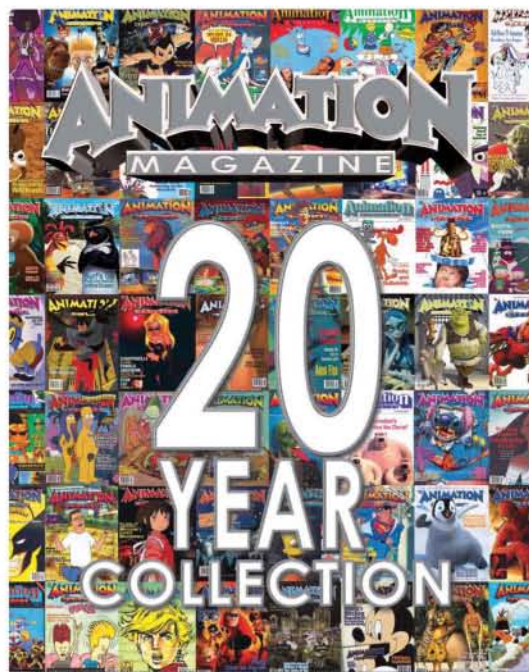
**101 Dalmatians 2: Patch's Big Adventure**, **Brother Bear** and **Piglet's Big Movie** are three of Disney's traditionally animated movies of the year.

**Sylvain Chomet's** whimsical, hand-drawn feature, **The Triplets of Belleville**, becomes an artistic hit in France and nabs two Oscar noms in 2004. Other animated movies of the year include **Raining Cats and Dogs**, **The Dog, the General and the Birds**, **Animatrix**, **El Cid—The Legend**, **Wonderful Days**, **Doggy Pool!**, **The Rain Children**, **Jimmy Neutron Adventures** and **Rugrats Go Wild**.

Warner Bros.' **Looney Tunes: Back in Action** combines live action with animation with mixed results.

2003 is a good year for innovative animated shorts. **Adam Elliot's Harvie Krumpet** leads the pack (and wins the Oscar the following year). Other big contenders: the **Disney/Dali** collaboration **Destino** (directed by **Dominique Monfery**), **Bud Luckey's Boundin'**, **Carlos Saldanha's Gone Nutty** and **Christopher Hinton's Nibbles**. ■





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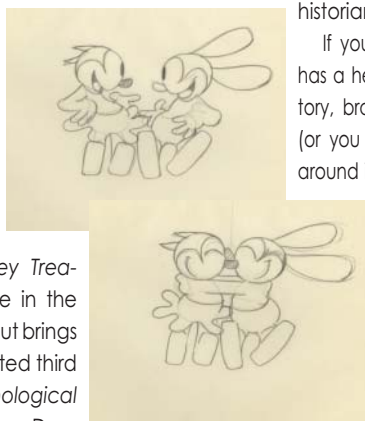
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# Dusting Off Some Forgotten Disney Magic

The seventh installment of *Walt Disney Treasures* celebrates Donald Duck, goes behind-the-scenes at Disneyland and brings Walt's pre-Mickey star into the spotlight. *by Mercedes Milligan*

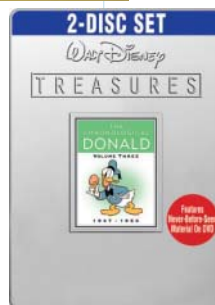
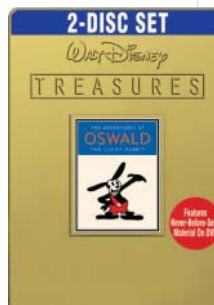
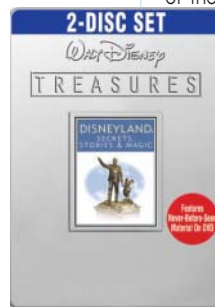
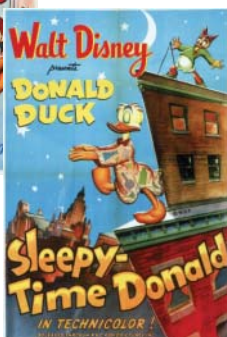
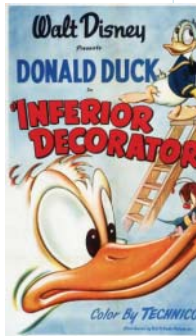
Animation fans across the nation really have something to hang on to those holiday gift cards for this year as we are hit with the seventh blast of releases from *Walt Disney Treasures*. This newest wave in the collectible DVD-set rollout brings with it the eagerly awaited third volume of *The Chronological Donald*. This edition covers Donald Duck's antics in the post-war years (1947-1950)—a time when, some critics feel, our hero was too cruelly mistreated by his parade of mischievous costars (including favorites like Chip and Dale and the nephews, as well as lesser-knowns like the Aracuan bird and the Bootle Beetle) for the shorts to be funny. Luckily, the majority of sadistic toon aficionados will be able to delight in this collection, regardless! Donald also manages to create his own chaos and give some of his best solo performances in a few notable shorts on these discs. Fans may recall his classic manic attempts to stop a leaky faucet in *Drip Dippy Donald*; his relationship troubles caused when a concussion leads to Sinatra-like crooning and, much to Daisy's displeasure, a swooning fandom in *Donald's Dilemma*; and his vocal transformation from unintelligible to debonair (with the help of Oscar-winner Ronald Colman, who lent his silver tongue to two other Donald shorts) in *Donald's Dream Voice*. The two-disc set also includes a few non-PC pieces in its "From the Vault" feature, as well as a retrospective of Donald's movie cameos and an informative interview with Disney character sculptor Ruben Procopio—the entire experience being expertly hosted by film



historian Leonard Maltin.

If your interest in animation has a healthy emphasis on history, branding and ephemera (or you just really love to spin around in a giant teacup), you will no doubt be interested in the fascinating behind-the-scenes retrospective collection *Disneyland: Secrets, Stories and Magic*.

Originally intended for release as part of the park's 50th anniversary, this set is packed with rarely (or never!) seen footage related to the conception, completion and evolution of Walt Disney's visionary accomplishment. The central feature is the brand new titular documentary that contains archival park footage, promotional films and interviews with Walt as well as material which spans the life of the park and new interviews with persons such as George Lucas, Roy Disney and legendary "Imagineer" Herb Ryman. Complimenting *Secrets* are episodes from the long-running *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color* series, a leisurely tour of 1956 Disneyland as seen in the TV special *People and Places: Disneyland U.S.A.*, a fascinating time-lapse photography look at the construction of the park and a never before released black and white docu entitled *Operation Disneyland*; a revealing look at the technical aspects and challenges of broadcasting the park's opening ceremonies live on ABC in 1955. Several more fascinating, fun and informative historical features



will pack your brain full of facts before you try your hand at the interactive trivia game—or, after all that learning, you can just unwind and marvel at the park's beauty and ingenuity by viewing the still frame gallery. Sorry, no giant teacups included!

While these sets will already have toonheads salivating, the crown jewel of this wave of *Treasures* is arguably the fresh-from-the-vaults release of the newly restored *The Adventures of Oswald*

the *Lucky Rabbit* shorts; rarely seen since they debuted on the silent screen 80 years ago. This is the spunky little rabbit who gave Walt Disney his greatest success before—and actually necessitated (when he was lost in a crooked deal with distributors at Universal in 1928)—the creation of Mickey Mouse. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of this collection is the ability to observe how both the character attributes and plot points in Oswald foreshadow the Mickey and Minnie shorts that were to come. Although not all of the Oswald shorts have survived long enough to make it onto this historic collection, those that have are presented here beautifully restored and augmented by new scores by silent film accompanist Robert Israel. Filling out the discs is the new featurette, *Oswald Comes Home*, which tells how Disney was able to reclaim

its little lost rabbit and includes interviews with Bob Iger, Roy Disney and Walt's daughter, Diane Disney Miller. Another insight into the history of this little-known character and his effect on the development of the Disney empire is provided by Leslie Iwerks' informative docu *The Hand Behind the Mouse: The Ub Iwerks Story* (1999). This piece traces the life of Ms. Iwerks'

grandfather, whose able talents launched the success of Oswald and who went on to almost single-handedly bring Walt's famous mouse to animated life. This remarkable set also includes three of Disney's Alice comedies that pre-date even Oswald, the Mickey shorts *Plane Crazy* and *Steamboat Willie* and the first of the *Silly Symphonies*, *The Skeleton Dance*—all of which exemplify Ub Iwerks' bouncy characters and lively animation, not to mention his legendary talent for the art form. This collection will definitely be a remarkable "new" discovery for many animation fans and is the perfect addition to these historic, must-have collections. ■

**All three two-disc sets are available in limited supply for \$32.99 each.**





# The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of the Latest Anime DVD Releases

by Charles Solomon



**A**lthough anime has largely outgrown its old "Big Eyes/Big Guns/Big Boobs" reputation, many

Americans still associate it with a slam-bang style of filmmaking that emphasizes rapid-fire editing and no-holds-barred action. In contrast to that rambunctious image, the stories in *Mushi-Shi* unfold at a measured pace that suggests traditional folktales.

*Mushi* are mysterious creatures that represent "life in its purest form," according to Ginko, the *Mushi-Shi* or *Mushi* Master. More ancient than plants and animals, they take many forms and may resemble plankton drawn in lines of light, amoebae, a gaseous cloud or a snail's shell. Neither good nor evil, they simply are. Soft-spoken, chain-smoking Ginko wanders through Japan, studying diverse forms of *Mushi* and the ways they interact with humanity: When humans and *Mushi* meet, the result can be beneficial—or disastrous.

Yuki Urushibara's popular manga won the Kodansha Award in 2006, so it's not surprising that director Hiroshi Nagahama and his crew stick very close to the look and content of the original. Like short stories, the individual episodes stand alone, linked only by Ginko and the *Mushi*.

In the first episode, "The Green Gathering," Ginko meets Shinra, a young artist with a mysterious talent: Whatever he draws with his left hand comes to life. If the characters he writes are based on old pictograms, they float off the page and assume an existence of their own. Naturally, these occurrences are tied to the presence of *Mushi*, who have also preserved the spirit of Shinra's grandmother; she watches over him in death, as she did in life.

Stranded in a rainstorm, Ginko meets a man whose father made the fatal mistake of touching the flowing river of prismatic

color formed by another type of *Mushi*. The beauty of that glowing rainbow haunted the man until his dying day, now his son Koro

comfort survivors and try to prevent a recurrence of such dangerous events as an eerie sea mist luring mariners to their doom.

Even in its lightest episodes, the tone of the series is subdued and vaguely melancholy.

Urishibara uses layers of gray to suggest brooding forests and shadowed interiors. The filmmakers expand the color palette, evoking traditional Japanese paintings and woodblock prints. An episode involving a *Mushi* that attaches itself to the root systems of bamboo, transforming a normal-looking grove into an inescapable maze, recalls the look of ink paintings and lacquerware. The animation is often minimal, consisting largely of pans and trucks over still artwork, but the restricted movements fit the tone of the stories and settings.

Toshio Masuda's sophisticated score blends exotic percussion, guitar, and traditional Japanese instruments, especially the *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute), to heighten the mood of each adventure.

Fans of Hayao Miyazaki will recognize the influence of his work, especially *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*, on *Mushi-Shi*. But at a time when a lot of Japanese animation feels stuck in familiar ruts, the understated, subtle and thought-provoking adventures of *Mushi-Shi* offer a welcome change of pace for more mature viewers. Yuki Urushiba's manga, which is published in America by Del Rey,

has also been made into a live-action feature by Katsuhiro Otomo, the creator of *Akira*, but it has yet to be released in the U.S. ■

("Rainbow Man") is trying to understand the phenomenon that took his father's life and sanity. Ginko's help and explanations enable Koro to resolve the mystery and lead a rational life.

But not every episode of *Mushi-Shi* ends happily. Sometimes all Ginko can do is



**Mushi-Shi, Volumes 1-3**  
[FUNimation: \$29.98 each]





# Have a Swampy Christmas!

How director Gary Trousdale and his crack team at DreamWorks Animation/PDI cooked up a special TV treat for Shrek fans. **by Ramin Zahed**

**T**here's something about animated characters that makes them ideal for holiday-themed TV specials. That's why it's not surprising that the folks at DreamWorks Animation put together a half-hour holiday adventure featuring everyone's favorite green ogre, Shrek, this year.

The cleverly titled *Shrek the Halls* finds our hero trying to share the holiday experience with his babies. However, he gets sidetracked as his buddies Donkey, Puss in Boots and yes, even the Gingerbread Man, each try to outdo each other by trying to explain their own versions of the spirit of the holiday season.

The task of directing the first *Shrek* TV outing fell in the able hands of toon master Gary Trousdale (*Beauty and the Beast*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*). After working on several elaborate feature films, Trousdale says he

welcomed the idea of taking on a shorter project. "A couple of years ago, I directed the short *The Madagascar Penguins in A Christmas Caper* for DreamWorks and really enjoyed that. The *Shrek* special also began as a short in which Donkey and Puss were going to the North Pole after finding out that Shrek was on Santa's naughty list. I was set to do the storyboards for the short, but it kept getting bigger and evolving, and I was eventually put on as director."

Calling *Shrek* one of the crown jewels at DreamWorks, Trousdale says although they only had 21 minutes to work with, the production team took an incredible amount of care to make sure the project looked as good as the movie. "The production values are absolutely theatrical level," he notes. "Most people don't have high-def sets and you don't watch TV in a quiet room, with the lights down. Never-



Gary Trousdale

theless, you want the animation to stand out. You can't have all the subtleties of the big screen, so we had to pump up the contrasts."

Another challenge for Trousdale and company was making sure every moment counts in the 21 minutes of story time. "When you work on a feature, you can always add and delete scenes, but for the special, we had to write something that fit the time slot. There's not room for negotiation. Usually, one script page is one minute of screen time—but in our case, we had a 50-page script, because we had lots of descriptions. We had to think visually and spell everything out."

Although the veteran animator defines himself as more of a pencil-and-paper guy, he points out that the CG animation team did an amazing job of depicting the snow scenes. "One of the things that the CG guys did in defiance of the accounting department was selling the cold snow scenes by adding misty breath for the characters. In the night time scenes, you have to make it look cold, and I have to admit, having those steams really made a huge difference."

*Shrek the Halls* producer Gina Shay



(The *SpongeBob SquarePants* Movie) was also one of the key forces in bringing the project to life. She recalls that the idea for the holiday special came from one of the storyboard artists who wrote a script which was a Christmas poem with a Shrek twist.

"We took that idea as a seed and created a story around it. It's a very relatable premise—any kind of holiday reunion creates a lot of chaos. At the same time, we were trying to stay away from the typical Christmas scenario where the holiday is ruined because Santa can't deliver the toys, etc."

Shay, who is also a producer on the *Shrek IV* movie slated for 2010, says it was a godsend that the animation team (based mostly at the PDI campus in Redwood City, Calif.) could use all the scenes and models from *Shrek the Third* and enhance the characters with different costumes. "We think audiences are really going to like to see the sparkling, high-quality



animated snow in the Shrek world," she adds. "Although the length of the special is about one-fourth of a feature, we did the same amount of work in a compressed time frame. Luckily, we inherited a lot of the people from *Shrek the Third*. At the production peak, we had about 200 people working on the special."

According to both Shay and producer Teresa Cheng (*Madagascar*), Trousdale's open personality and good humor were big reasons for why the crew loved working on the show. "They love the way he directs and how he embraces other people's ideas and visions," notes Shay. "Not only did he storyboard the show, he also wrote the lyrics to the

wonderful song we hear over the end credits. We'll definitely include the complete version of the song—in which all the secondary characters like the Three Blind Mice, the Three Little Pigs and Pinocchio—sing 'Deck the Halls.'"

As Trousdale explains, it's the meticulously craft-

ed and believable characters that set this special apart from the usual by-the-numbers holiday offerings. "As great as the animation is, for me, the most fun and enjoyment come out of the story and the characters," he says. "It reminds me of what Roy Disney always used to say: That the three most important things are story, story and story. I've always loved the characters in the Shrek world, especially the support players, and we were lucky to be allowed to have a lot of holiday fun with them here." ■

**Shrek the Halls premiered on ABC on Nov. 28. The network will re-air the special on Dec. 11 at 8 p.m.**

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# The Padded Cel

by Robby London



## Toon Scribes Channel Residual Anger!

**W**e animation writers suffer from a deep-seated residual anger. I don't mean the kind that results in torturing insects, road rage and ordering 27 pizzas to be delivered to your enemy. Fortunately *that* tragic condition only afflicts a tiny subset of animation writers who are immature, unbalanced and sophomoric. (And, for the record, I typically limit the pizzas to 19.) No, the "residual anger" at issue here is ... anger over the lack of residuals!

The glaring disparities and inequities between animation writers and our live-action brethren (and sistren—is everybody happy now?) are brought into stark relief by the Writers Guild of America strike which remains in force as we go to press.

Of course, with the exception of a few long-running prime time animated series like *The Simpsons* and *King of The Hill* and some of the high-budget animated features, animation writing is *not* covered by the WGA. Animation writers find it ironic that the deal-breaking issue for the WGA in this current work stoppage is a demand for a higher share of residuals for DVDs and new media. We would like a higher share too: As in ... anything higher than zero!

Don't think every animation scribe hasn't fantasized about what our retirement accounts would look like if we had received residuals, especially given that animation series typically have a far more frequent rerun cycle—and a much longer shelf life—than live action. But the only unexpected checks in our mailboxes are the phony ones from Publisher's Clearinghouse. Or the rebate that actually arrives.

And it's not only the residuals. We miss out on a host of other advantages, benefits and protections afforded to WGA members. (As if it weren't punishment enough that our groupies are ...children.) And talk about "clout?" If you're familiar with the old joke about the aspiring (insert-stupid-ethnic-affiliation-of-choice)

typically 50 percent higher than live-action scripts for equivalent screen time.)

This is not to say that we don't support our comparatively rich, pampered and coddled live-action counterparts in their moment of proletarian struggle. (Who, US bitter?) At the end of the day, we're all still writers, facing the same terror of the blank page, the same torture of insipid notes and the same machinations of all-powerful profit-hungry corporations seeking to minimize our revenues. Hell, we even share the same persecution complex!

Moreover, I've never known an animation writer who did not desire to segue to live action if only because of the better conditions: Pay, benefits, protections and enhanced respect. (Not to mention the prospect of groupies who are actually of legal age.) I'm certain most all of us support the WGA, if only in the self-interest that we may one day benefit from whatever gains are achieved.

But still, we feel a certain vindication when WGA members come "slumming" to our house for dinner and see the table scraps. During the last

strike, live-action writers—who are technically permitted by their guild to work in non-covered animation—flooded animation story editors seeking assignments. Many longtime WGA members were shocked and outraged at the conditions they found. What can we say? It's Toon-a-town, Jake! We struck out a long time ago. ■

**Animation veteran Robby London was last seen enjoying a very expensive-looking meal with Rupert Murdoch and Leslie Moonves in Cannes.**



Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

starlet who tried to further her acting career by sleeping with the screenwriter, well...even she wouldn't sleep with the animation writer! (You can trust me on that one.)

What makes all this particularly frustrating for animation writers is that our work process and "work product" are virtually identical to those of live-action writers. In fact, our job is arguably *more difficult* because we're expected to "direct on paper" and provide more detailed visual descriptions (requiring script page counts



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#### A Rotten Big Apple:

In addition to digitally producing the zombie masses of the movie, the vfx team had to recreate 800 vfx shots featuring a deserted NYC landscape, populated with infected dogs, deer and rats.

# Infection Connection

Animation pro David Schaub opens up about creating the believable zombie effects for the eagerly awaited *I Am Legend* movie. **by Ron Magid**

If there's anything more terrifying than a supercharged pack of infected humanoid pursuers Will Smith, it's animating the critters in plates shot in anamorphic—where the original 35mm images are squeezed in-camera so that when projected unsqueezed, the film looks like it was shot in 70mm widescreen.

"Everything is warped," laments animation director David Schaub, whose previous gig was the decidedly unwarped *Surf's Up*. "There's no simple algorithm to un-warp an anamorphic lens, because the distortion changes as you move a camera through a scene. The distortions had to be dealt with on a shot-by-shot basis before the plates could be tracked and matchmoved."

Once the fx were rendered and composited, the shots had to be re-warped back into the anamorphic format. "Thankfully Jim Berney, our visual effects supervisor, was handling that horror while I was dealing with the animation," Schaub says.

Then there was the problem of creating inhuman zombie movements that didn't look like cartoons. "When practical characters didn't work—the tests

looked just like actors in makeup—we went digital," Schaub says. "[Director] Francis Lawrence wanted movement that was not entirely stylized, but beyond human performance alone. [Supervising animator] Marco Marengi did motion studies with the crew before I came on—insect-like behaviors, running on quads like gibbons—and many other tests that were promising. Ultimately, Francis settled on pushing human-like movement to the limits."

The solution: Motion capture, aug-

task of painting out the mo-cap actors—not just wires and tennis balls, but full-frame human figures! In the end, the on-set motion capture gave us the placement of the actors, how much distance they cover, along with a rough blocking of the performance. Then there's lots of detailed animation work for the subtle performance moments, and even more so for the broad stuff [such as in the infected creatures' incredible speed] that actors can't necessarily do."

So how did Schaub and company make the zombies run stronger and faster? "Longer strides," he reveals. "Wherever possible, we started with motion capture and altered that. The director wanted a sprint, so we'd look at Carl Lewis and other runners. Their feet don't get way out in front, they stay very controlled underneath their body. Just ex-

"We take every opportunity to make every shot the best it can be. We have one chance to get it right and once that time has passed then there is no going back—it is locked on celluloid forever. That's the driving force behind much of what we do."

—*I Am Legend's* animation director David Schaub

mented with animation. "They shot the motion-capture actors wearing markers on-set, which allowed Will Smith to feed right off the characters in the scene, instead of acting opposite a tennis ball," Schaub recalls. "But the on-set capture data was mediocre at best, since the markers were easily occluded by other actors. And then there was the huge

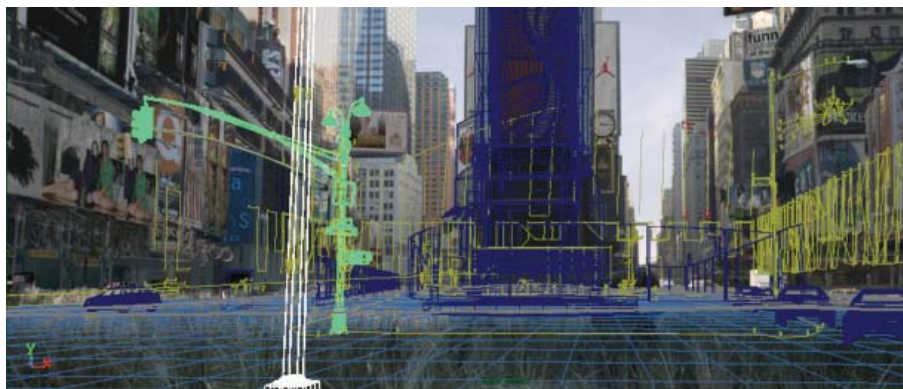
tending the Infected's legs gave them a longer stride to cover more distance without changing the physical dynamic of the run."

The Infected also have a peculiarly violent reaction to sunlight. "They hit the ground like they're being zapped with a thousand volts," Schaub explains. "It was a process to figure out the right taz-



er-like performance: They throw themselves against walls, down stairs and out windows and flop around on the ground like fish. We'd take a motion-capture performance and really amp it up—when a character hits the ground, we'd animate his head repeatedly slamming into the pavement—because that feels better than getting burned! It's really violent, bone-cracking stuff that couldn't be achieved with real actors."

But there's far more than just enhanced motion capture to the Infecteds' performances. There's a lot of hand animation, particularly when it comes to their expressions. "We didn't rig our CG character faces for motion capture, but opted for a full set of animation controls to get the performance," Schaub says. "The infected characters don't speak, so there's a lot of emoting through their eyes and facial expressions, plus they can unhinge their jaws and make their mouths wide like a snake when it swallows an egg. We went through a whole process to find out how far we could go before it started to look silly. So again we're pushing beyond what humans can do but not to the point where it looks completely unbelievable. Then



the muscles and tendons in their necks are flexing and pulsing—all of which keeps the characters alive and organic in a very non-CG way."

After everything that could be ani-

ected dogs, deer and rats—to the tune of nearly 800 vfx shots. Their mantra, according to Schaub, was, "We take every opportunity to make every shot the best it can be. We have one chance to get it



they've got this really high metabolism and they're always hyperventilating. That's not in the performance capture, that's a layer of animation we added—little twitches and things to give them that infected quality. So they're giving a performance, hyperventilating and their faces are incredibly elastic—their nostrils are flaring, their cheeks are puffing and

mated was, Schaub's team handed off to technical directors working under visual effects supervisor Jim Berney, who struggled in their own right to give the Infected a somewhat translucent skin revealing bones and sub-surface muscles beneath and to create a deserted New York cityscape as well, which Schaub's animators populated with in-

right and once that time has passed then there is no going back—it is locked on celluloid forever. That's the driving force behind much of what we do. We had an incredibly strong

and passionate animation crew who were all of similar mind—the pursuit of putting magic on the screen. Their artistry and devotion definitely shows in the final result." ■

**Warner Bros.' *I Am Legend* begins its U.S. theatrical run on December 14 and opens in other major territories throughout the month.**



# Digital Magic

by Christopher Grove



## On Animated Antelopes and Other Year-End Thought Bubbles

At this time of year, there tends to be a surfeit of top-10 lists. So I'll leave that to someone else. Besides, other than the one real reportorial highlight of my year (being scolded by Jerry Seinfeld for what he perceived as my technical shortcomings as a reporter when I told him I hadn't tape-recorded our phone interview) and the fact that a cartoon (*Ratatouille*) wasn't just the best animated film of the year but was, arguably, one of the best films of the year, that's all I have to say about 2007!

Ever since they landed their first big feature job a couple of years ago (*Underworld: Evolution*) Venice, Calif.-based Luma Pictures has been on the rise. The latest evidence: Payam Shohadai and his team's extensive work on the new Coen brothers' film *No Country for Old Men*. It's not the kind of film one necessarily associates with visual fx. But the Coens set the film in an environment that essentially doesn't exist.

Based on the book by Cormac McCarthy, the story is a tense, violent and darkly witty tale that centers on a multi-million dollar drug deal that goes bad in the unforgiving hinterland of West Texas. When Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) accidentally finds the abandoned loot, he sets off a chain reaction of catastrophic violence that not even the law can contain.

For its part, Luma was the project's sole visual effects supplier, delivering more than 60 shots. Since its first gig five years ago, Luma has produced shots for *Pirates of the Caribbean: At Worlds End*, *Apocalypto*, *Rush Hour 3*, *Crash* and the Oscar-winning *Ray*.

Among the list of impressive accomplishments on *No Country For Old Men*: The hunting sequence where Moss kills a prong-



horn antelope and then stumbles upon several dead bodies. The dozens of animals pictured in the sequence are CG. Luma artists developed a number of distinct antelope models repre-

senting animals of varying sex and age, and each one was animated to reflect a variety of individual performances. The artists studied various wildlife documentaries and biomechanics research in order to better understand natural animal behavior and movement. The inclusion of subtleties such as tail twitches and the independent movement of the ears in the animation

helped to give life and realism to the CG versions. "It was an honor to work for such great filmmakers, and we certainly hope to work with [them] on future projects," says Shohadai, executive visual effects supervisor.

### Online HIT List

If studio heads want the public (and the WGA) to believe that there's no real money in entertainment content delivery via the Internet (and other non-traditional platforms) no one told execs at thePlatform.com.

Before and since becoming a subsidiary of Comcast, thePlatform has been making some aggressive moves especially with respect to the lucrative children's animation market. Recently HIT Entertainment, a leading provider of preschool programming, announced that it has contracted thePlatform for two jobs. First, to manage the back-end video platform for HIT's brand specific web channels and second, the syndication of HIT's A-list children's videos to other destination websites in multiple territories.

Early results have been impressive. When thePlatform launched video on the U.S. *Thomas & Friends* site in late October, for example, there were more than 3 million streams in the first two weeks. The rollout of video on HIT's other brand sites such as *Angelina Ballerina*, the indefatigable *Barney*, *Bob the Builder* and *Fireman Sam* will continue through 2008. "HIT is always looking for new and innovative ways to

continued on page 53





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Image from 'The Gloomer' by Andy Huang

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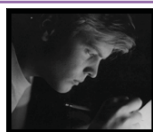
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# Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



## Luxology's modo 301

**M**odeling fanatics have a good reason to be grateful this Thanksgiving. Luxology's modo 301 is now ready to be downloaded or purchased in box format. I don't know how these guys do it! It seems as if Luxology is coming out with milestone versions faster than people can buy them. Everything seems rock stable. There have been some pretty robust advances, but nothing so substantial as to break anything that worked before.

The primary tools that have been added are for digital sculpting. In the past, modo was known for its SubD polymodeling tools, which is an incredibly effective and fast way of modeling. With the addition of the sculpt tools, it becomes a competitor for ZBrush and Mudbox and will potentially bring those used to digital sculpting into the fold.

Modo 301 has also added keyframe animation. Now, this doesn't mean that you should start creating full scenes with this package. I don't think modo is meant for that just yet. But, it does give the modeler flexibility to test morph/blend shapes, animate materials, etc. And, just another reason to stay in the modeling environment: Animation is limited to modeling parameters, so there are no sophisticated bones, skinning or IK systems. Regardless, it's a nice feature and worth the upgrade.

The painting tools have also been beefed up. You may paint on the model and, while doing so, you paint across multiple texture maps and even multiple UVs to ensure seamless texture work across the entire model. I, per-



sonally, hate going into UV mapping, so the more I don't have to go there, the happier I am. Furthermore, you can paint normal maps directly on the surface. With enhancements to the core to utilize multiple processors, the paint features (and others) have noticeable speed and performance increases.

Finally, rendering power has been boosted by allowing for 50 rendering nodes—which means 50 machines, not 50 procs. So if you have a bunch of dual or quad proc machines sitting around, only one node is used for each machine. That's quite a bit of render power.

Overall, it's quite a nice upgrade, especially in the sculpting and painting tools. I like that animation and rendering are all in the package, but I prefer to have the software be great at a few things, than merely good at a lot of things. This one is definitely worth a look, especially if you're a modeling nut.

**Website:** [www.luxology.com](http://www.luxology.com)

**Price:** \$895, download or box version

## Toon Boom's Storyboard Pro

**M**ontreal-based animation software powerhouse Toon Boom has released a new version of its storyboard software, Storyboard Pro. Already established as a fine tech tool for storyboarding and incorporated into a broader pipeline of other Toon Boom products including its animation program (Digital Pro), Storyboard Pro has a number of



nifty additions.

The interface has features to make the painting and drawing process better. Yes, you can import drawings done the old fashioned way with pencil and pen. But, with SBPro and a Wacom, you can sure get a long way. Strokes are converted to objects (much like Flash), which can be moved, sized, skewed, etc. after the fact. Layers have been added to panes, so that you can paint underneath the strokes. This feature also makes importing Photoshop files a bit more intuitive, plus you can export back out to Photoshop with layer support.

When dealing with Storyboard, as with animation and live-action editing, integration into the rest of the pipeline is key. Toon Boom has improved Storyboard Pro's pipeline integration to include other editing solutions. The package is already set up to work seamlessly with the other Toon Boom products, but AAF support has been implemented to export to other editing systems like Avid, Premiere and Final Cut Pro (with a little help from Automatic Duck or other free I/O plugs for FCP). You can also export your storyboard editorial data to a CSV in order to bring it into a spreadsheet program. Now, these features don't have a huge thrill factor in them from an artistic standpoint, but from a production perspective, they are absolutely necessary for a smooth project.

Storyboard Pro users can take advantage of the system's onion-skinning for creation of key poses, draw behind mode to paint behind contour lines, merge layers and flip drawings or layers. The product's extended animatic features also allow artists to spread camera and layer motion over panels, define camera and layer hold time at the beginning or end of panels and link audio tracks to panels to keep audio files in sync.

Storyboarding is essential to filmmaking, game design, animation, etc. The fact that the program is created by a company that specializes in animation software shouldn't dissuade live-action filmmak-



ers from looking into it. Storyboard Pro is, at the very least, a tool to quickly lay-out your ideas into visuals and, at best, a robust tool that carries those ideas into the next stages of production.

**Website:** [www.toonboom.com/products/storyboardpro](http://www.toonboom.com/products/storyboardpro)

**Price:** \$899 (standard version); \$699 (upgrade from Storyboard)

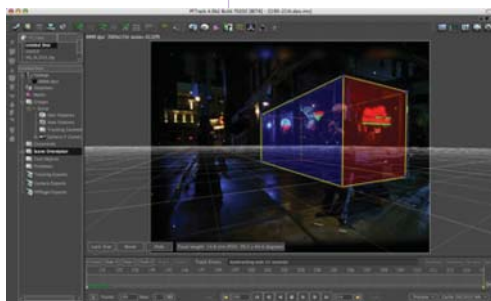
### The Pixel Farm's PFTrack 4.1

VFX pros have always known about the importance of tracking. It used to take people with big brains like Dennis Muren or Scott Squires to track points in background footage and somehow program a camera on a motion-control rig to recreate the movement. I don't even want to know what kind of voodoo magic they were involved with.

Nowadays, tracking happens in almost every single visual effects shot that goes through the pipe. Without a locked track, you can be assured that the rest of the

shot will probably fail. This required some heavy hitters. Boujou, 3DEqualizer, REALVIZ MatchMover and even the little guy, SynthEyes, all provide great tracking. Now, PFTrack 4.1 from U.K.'s The Pixel Farm is offering some good stuff in it that's like tracking with a twist. Sure, it does tracking of moving shots. It does tracking of moving objects. But what it does really quite well is tracking cameras *and* moving objects in the same shot. This is not a unique property, but PFTrack delivers it without pain and heartache.

You can also use geometry within PFTrack to help with the solution—both for camera and object. So, face and head replacement can use the actual (or proxy) geometry of the character to help in the motion solve; the same with placing buildings for set extensions. You don't need any more object primitives to estimate whether the track works.



Jeez, what else? This thing is jam-packed with tracking love. Focal estimation tools for assisting in guessing the lens size of a camera, dis-

tortion compensation tools (although I like boujou's better), great deal of control of the animation curves once a solve has been created, and ability to extract Z-depth information on a scene with a moving camera. The system also allows pros to use a moving camera or multiple camera angles to create a model from the images and offers optical flow pixel analysis for applying filters along with Shake nodes to help with that.

I have used PFTrack in production and found it stable and reasonable to work with. I can go in and manipulate the data after the solve. The only thing missing (or at least I haven't found it yet) is the ability to add location points after the solve to get a denser and user-controlled point cloud. I'll keep looking, though!

At approx \$6,000 it's probably a bit pricey for hobbyists—you are better off buying a cheap car or a nice bike! However, production should definitely incorporate it into the arsenal of their matchmove department.

**Website:** [www.pfclean.com](http://www.pfclean.com)

**Price:** £ 3,000 (approximately \$6,130) ■

**Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and vfx supervisor of Max Ink Productions. He can be reached at [ducky@maxinkcafe.com](mailto:ducky@maxinkcafe.com).**

### Digital Magic

continued from page 50

expand distribution of our award-winning content," says Robert Weisstuch, senior vice president/CIO, HIT Entertainment. "By utilizing thePlatform, we will implement an on-line publishing and management system that can handle our needs and be flexible enough to grow with our content and viewers into the future."

### In Praise of Kinder, Gentler Games

Hardcore gamers will probably snicker, but not everybody wants to street race or kill hookers (or just about anything else in their path) when they're playing video games.

In a recent survey by Information Solutions Group, 80 percent of parents and grandparents who play so-called casual games said they play them with their children and grandchildren and 92 percent said the



games provide a great bonding opportunity. "Casual games span generations and genders in ways that traditional hardcore video games never have," says Dr. Carl Arnoldo, a New York-based psychologist and author of the new book *Essentials of Smart Parenting*. "The G-rated content of the games makes them a great activity in which the whole family can participate, with each generation en-

joying the games in different ways while also enjoying the interaction with other family members." And there's a lot of money to be made in the vidgame market below "M" and "A" ratings. For example, titles from Seattle-based PopCap Games have been downloaded more than 350 million times by consumers worldwide. (Its flagship title Be-

jeweled has sold more than 10 million units across all platforms.) And, wouldn't you know it, just in time for the 2007 holiday season PopCap is releasing two new greatest hits compilations for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 2. Including classic hits such as Bejeweled 2, Zuma, Feeding Frenzy and Astropop, PopCap Arcade Volume 1 for Xbox and PopCap Hits Volume 1 for PlayStation 2 will sell for \$29.99 and \$19.99, respectively. ■

**Chris Grove is a Los Angeles-based journalist and actor. If you have hot tips for Chris, you can email him at [cwjg@earthlink.net](mailto:cwjg@earthlink.net).**





*Envious Heart*  
by Carolyn Chrisman (age 15)



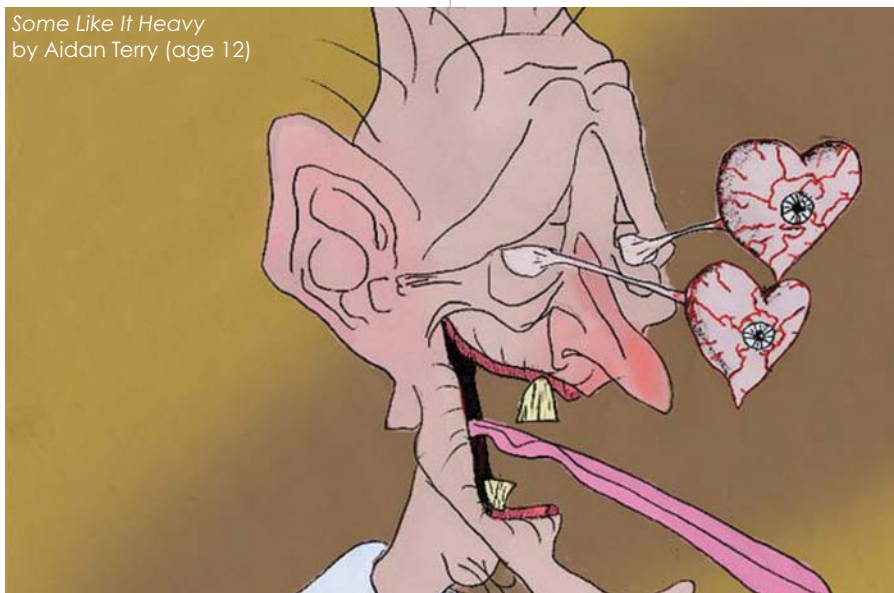
# Toon Titans: The Next Generation!

Earthlight's online program is emerging as an incredibly practical way of training animation prodigies around the country. *by Ellen Wolff*

**W**e always hear about musical prodigies who play concertos while other kids are playing softball. Less common is news of animation prodigies, but one teacher who's mentored more than one fledgling animator now has launched an Internet-based training program that could help nurture other new talents wherever they may be. Through Earthlight Animation Teletraining, closed-circuit, real-time video classes are available to students at their desktop computers. It's an approach that teacher John Teton hopes "will open the door to aspiring animators, regardless of age. We want it to be affordable for students under 18—or even under 14 or younger."

Teton, a writer/filmmaker who has taught animation to students in both high schools and at colleges like San Francisco State and L.A.'s Otis College of Art & Design, has cause for optimism. When he began working with teenage animators 10 years ago at Santa Barbara's Anacapa High School, he wound up inspiring students who are

*Some Like It Heavy*  
by Aidan Terry (age 12)



now pursuing animation careers. J.J. Villard (who at age 16 became what he calls "John Teton's test case") is now an award-winning animator who worked on *Shrek the Third*, while Carolyn Chrisman began studying animation at age 12 with Teton and is now in USC's animation B.A. program.

It was after Teton moved from California to Oregon in 2005 that he thought about creating a "virtual" animation training program. He then developed Earthlight's TelAnimate program in concert with I.T. specialist Michael Ray Allison. "We worked with a number of manufacturers to get a stable signal that was smooth enough for our purposes," Teton explains. "It's not just a videoconference; I screen examples from films, and I have to be able to go down to a fraction of a second. While videoconferencing technology has been around for a long time, to do it economically—at sufficient quality—took quite a bit of work." The system is configured using a combination of commercially available software programs, Teton explains, "so very little code writing was done."

The Earthlight approach was designed to be a virtual classroom in which students watch and discuss film clips that illustrate motion design, squash & stretch and other classic animation principles. "Students can stream films from our website, or—with a single click—download them to their computers." But Teton stresses that it's

hardly a solitary exercise. "I can see all of the students and they can see their classmates. Just as in a live class, everyone is present. We simply use the web cam to show them somebody's drawings. It's very flexible."

*continued on page 56*



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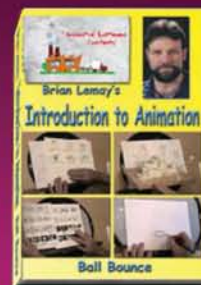
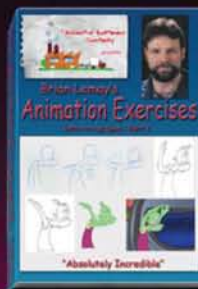
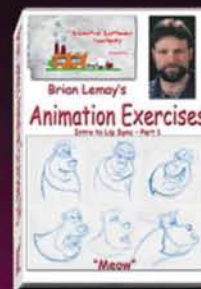
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## Opportunities

continued from page 54

Now in its third semester, the Earthlight Teletraining program is basically divided into one class for beginners and another for more advanced students, though Teton also does individualized instruction. "Early on, students learn about developing project ideas and learn the principles of cinematic storytelling and setting up a production. I also cover character de-

sign, introduction to acting, layout and cel techniques."

More advanced classes tend to vary, depending upon the individual films that the participants are developing. "We cover things like sound design, shot pacing, gauging in-betweens and how one- and two-point perspective affects backgrounds. Most of the students thus far tend to create hand-drawn animation, but some have used

computers, clay and even [LEGO figures]. My goal is not to restrict them."

One thing he's adamant about is not talking down to students, however young they may be. J.J. Villard, who first inspired Teton to develop a curriculum for young animators and went on to graduate from CalArts, says, "John talks to kids just like he does to adults. Having someone talk straight to kids and tell them that they can do big things with animation really has an impact. I didn't realize until I got to DreamWorks years later how lucky I had been."

Being exposed to professional production standards at a young age also prepared Carolyn Chrisman to enter USC's film school "knowing what animation takes," she says. Under Teton's tutelage, Chrisman spent two years animating her prize-winning film *Envious Heart*, which she completed at age 16 and which was chosen for the Santa Barbara Film Festival. Teton's approach to teaching animation isn't just about learning techniques, notes Chrisman. "It's about understanding visual storytelling and the elements that make a plot work."

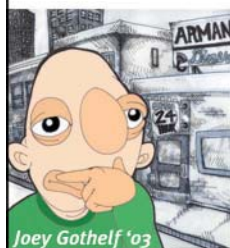
Teton believes that young artists readily grasp the principles of cinematic storytelling and that animation programs suitable for kids don't have to be what he calls "glorified childcare with animation equipment. Students as young as 10 years old are learning to predict accurately how long a project will take to complete many months down the line. That's something that many college graduates never learn."

As proof, he points to a rising star student named Aidan Terry, who at age 13 has been creating award-winning animation for three years. "For one film, Aidan did 2,000 hand-drawn frames that he colored in Adobe Photoshop. Talented students shouldn't have to wait until high school to learn this art form. There are incredibly fine musicians in elementary school, so why not animators?" ■

**Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in animation, vfx and education. If you have story ideas for her, you can email her at [edit@animationmagazine.net](mailto:edit@animationmagazine.net).**

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Flickerfest Int'l Short Film Festival	Jan. 4-13	Sydney, Australia	<a href="http://www.flickerfest.com.au">www.flickerfest.com.au</a>
Int'l CES	Jan. 7-10	Las Vegas, NV	<a href="http://www.cesweb.org">www.cesweb.org</a>
Future Film Festival-New Animation Cinema Technologies	Jan. 15-20	Bologna, Italy	<a href="http://www.futurefilmfestival.org">www.futurefilmfestival.org</a>
Sundance Film Festival	Jan. 17-24	Park City, UT	<a href="http://www.sundance.org/festival">www.sundance.org/festival</a>
Slamdance Film Festival	Jan. 17-25	Park City, UT	<a href="http://www.slamdance.com">www.slamdance.com</a>
Int'l Film Festival Rotterdam	Jan. 23 - Feb. 3	Rotterdam, Holland	<a href="http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com">www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com</a>
Santa Barbara Int'l Film Festival	Jan. 24 - Feb. 3	Santa Barbara, CA	<a href="http://www.sbfilmfestival.org">www.sbfilmfestival.org</a>
Göteborg Film Festival	Jan. 25 - Feb. 4	Göteborg, Sweden	<a href="http://www.filmfestival.org/filmfestival">www.filmfestival.org/filmfestival</a>
NATPE (feat. NATPE Mobile)	Jan. 28-31	Las Vegas, NV	<a href="http://www.natpe.org">www.natpe.org</a>
Transmediale - Int'l Media Art Festival Berlin	Jan. 29 - Feb. 3	Berlin, Germany	<a href="http://www.transmediale.de">www.transmediale.de</a>

[In the Next Issue of]

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Located in the Dutch city of Hilversum, kids' entertainment powerhouse **Telescreen** celebrates its 25th Anniversary in 2008. The company produces, distributes and handles licensing for numerous children's shows and properties—including **Miffy**, **Moonin**, **Alfred J. Kwak** and the latest, **Frog & Friends**—in the region. Here's what a typical day at Telescreen looks like:



7:45 a.m. General manager Theo van der Schaaf reads Animation Magazine to find out the latest news about his favorite animated properties.



9:05 a.m. They may not be able to smoke in Toon Town, but the lovely ladies of Telescreen find time to light up outside the building.



10:10 a.m. Director of commercial affairs Sjoerd and financial administrator Harm have a quick meeting in which they iron out the details of their global domination strategy.



11:15 a.m. Artwork controller Jacinta makes some extra money on the side by snapping some glamour shots of the Frog & Friends characters.



12:10 p.m. When they're not at Telescreen, business manager Philippo and artwork controller Bianca ride the mean streets of Hilversum, fighting crime.



12:30 p.m. In the Netherlands, everybody eats healthy lunches (*Koffietafel*)—which mainly consist of bread, cheeses and sliced meat. Except Frog, who always demands a bag of spiders and snails.



1:15 p.m. Sales exec Monique sets up the room for a screening of The Golden Compass trailer. She brings in the giant Heineken keg after the photographer leaves the room.



2:20 p.m. Licensing director Hanny closes a sweet deal for Dibo, Shaun the Sheep and The Teletubbies before signing a special pact with Satan.



3:30 p.m. At times producer Lisette gets too involved with the disturbing storylines and tragic characters of Frog & Friends.



4:10 p.m. Poor marketing and p.r. guru Linde is stuck with putting together this mind-numbing Day in the Life feature.



4:30 p.m. Licensing director Jeroen makes sure his shocking presentation of Bad Alice shakes up the whole staff after their daily afternoon nap.



5:10 p.m. Philippo sends Miffy out to get him a six-pack of Grolsch every afternoon.



6:05 p.m. Kids everywhere are hoping Santa will bring them a special copy of the hot Girls of Telescreen calendar.





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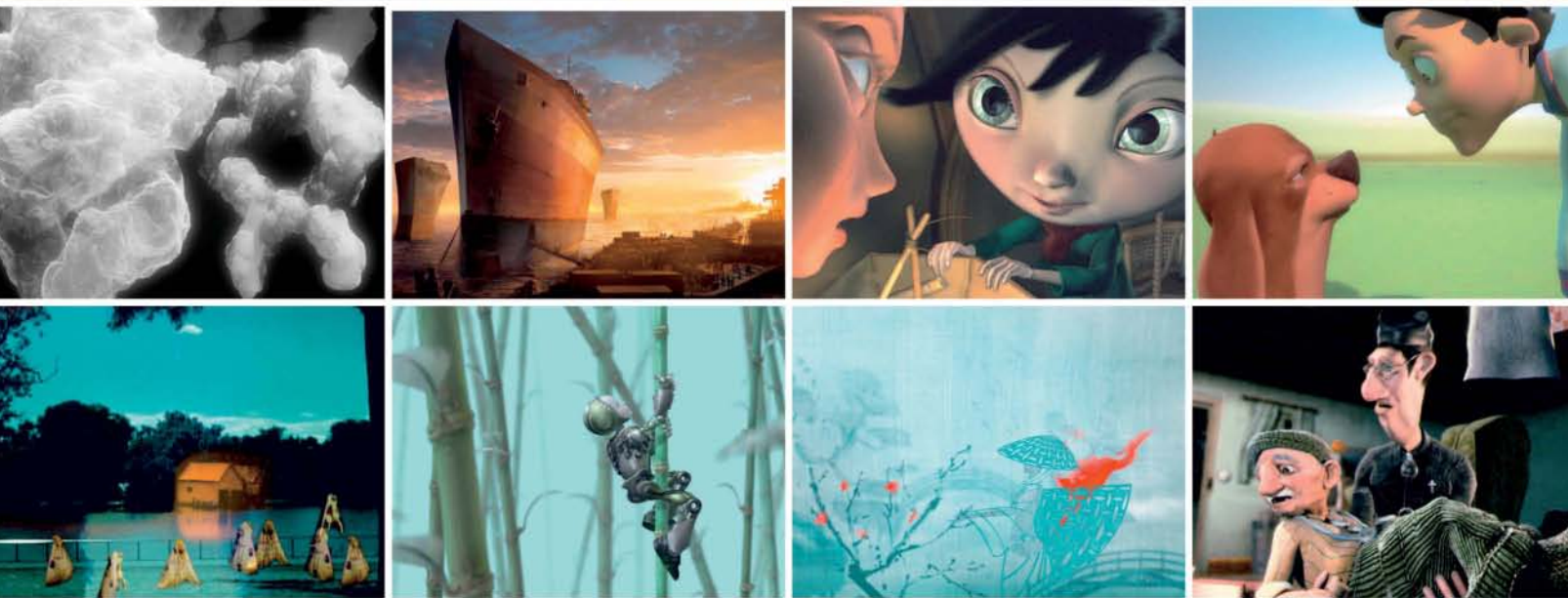
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The "Computer Animation / Film / VFX" category has been part of the Prix Ars Electronica since its very inception. It recognizes excellence in independent work in the arts and sciences as well as in high-end commercial productions in the film, advertising and entertainment industries. In this category, artistic originality counts just as much as masterful technical achievement.

For more detailed information, see [prixars.aec.at](http://prixars.aec.at)

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